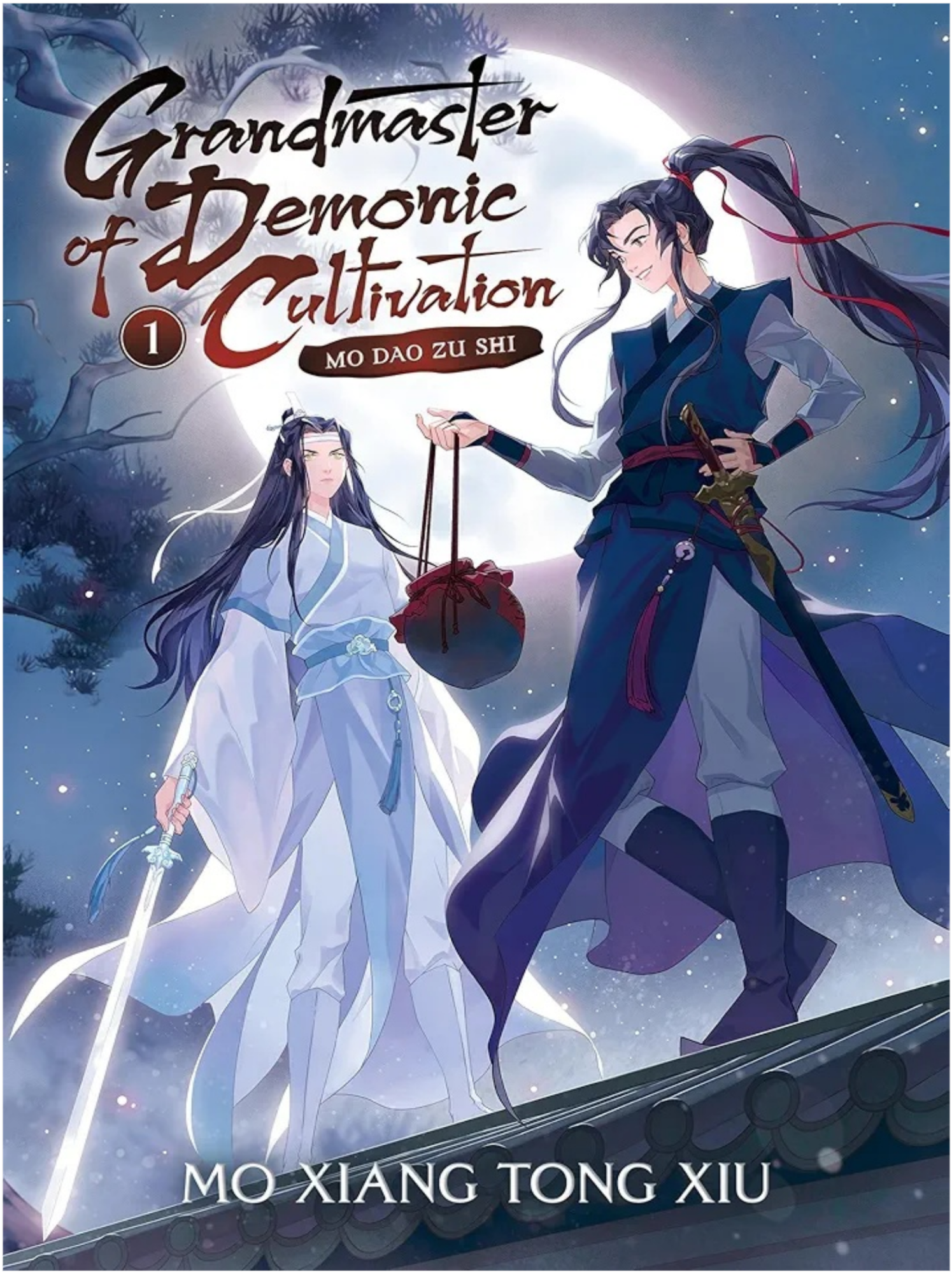
Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation
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MO DAO ZU SHI
MO XIANG TONG XIU

Chapter 1: Prologue

Less than a day had passed since the siege on Luanzang Hill, and the news spread through the cultivation world as if it sprouted wings, surpassing even the speed of warfare.

For a while, from the most prominent sects to rogue cultivators, everyone was discussing the siege lead by the Four Great Sects and followed by hundreds of smaller ones.

“The YiLing Patriarch has died? Who could have killed ?”

“Who other than his shidi, Jiang Cheng, putting an end to his own relative for the greater good. Jiang Cheng led the Four Sects of YunmengJiang, LanlingJin, GusuLan, and QinghеNie to destroy his ‘den’—Luanzang Hill.”

“I must say, good riddance!”

“Good riddance indeed! We finally eliminated this scourge.”

“If not for the YunmengJiang Sect adopting and teaching him, he would have only been a hobo living on the streets, let alone causing mayhem as bold as the ones these days. The head of the Jiang Sect raised him as his own child, yet he defected from them and became the enemy of the cultivation world, bringing shame upon the Jiang Sect, even leading to its near-extermination. He is the prime example of biting the hand that feeds him!”

“Jiang Cheng allowed this fellow to live for too long. If I were him, at the time of the defection, I wouldn’t have just stabbed him. In fact, I would have thoroughly examined the disciples of the sect again, so that he couldn’t do those crazy things he did later on. Who cares about the so called ‘considerations’ that he gave to his childhood friend.”

“That’s merely hearsay. Although Jiang Cheng was one of the main forces, he did not give Wei WuXian the final blow. Since he cultivated the Dark Path, Wei WuXian’s powers backfired and he was ripped to pieces.”

“Hahahaha… That’s karma! The ghost soldiers that he created are like unleashed dogs, biting everyone that they come across. It serves him right to be chewed to death!”

“But, if not for Jiang Cheng making a plan that aimed at Wei WuXian’s weaknesses, the siege might not have succeeded. Should I remind you folks of the item that Wei WuXian possessed? Did you forget about the day that three thousand skilled cultivators were completely annihilated?”

“I heard that it was more than three thousand, possibly five thousand.”

“He was most certainly out of his mind.”

“It’s a good thing that he destroyed that evil weapon before he died. Otherwise, if it was left in this world to harm humankind, his sins would have been worse.”

“Oh well… You know, back then, Wei WuXian was one of the most promising cultivators, coming from a highly distinguished sect and finding success at a young age. How on Earth did he end up where he was?”

“This proves that one can only cultivate by following the right path. Using these dishonest practices only seems beneficial at first glance. Look what happened in the end. Not even a whole corpse was left of him.”

“Not everything was because of his cultivation path. Wei WuXian’s personality was quite immoral. One’s deeds will be paid, one way or another—what goes around always comes around.”

…

After Wei WuXian’s death, the era was focussed on the topic. The discussions of the people were mostly the same, with a few unconventional opinions being brought down immediately.

However, the elephant in the room stayed in the back of everyone’s mind.

Nobody could summon Wei WuXian’s soul, which meant that his soul had disappeared.

It might have been torn apart by the millions of ghosts that devoured him.

Or, it might have escaped.

If it was the first, then all was well. Then again, nobody doubted the fact that the YiLing Patriarch had the power to move mountains and empty seas. If it was the last, his soul would

eventually return to revive in his body. When the day came, the cultivation world, or even all of mortal land, would be faced with the most insane damnation and revenge, sinking into nothing but chaos and despair.

The various sects set one hundred and twenty stone beasts on top of Luanzang Hill and initiated frequent soul-summoning rituals, followed by heightened vigilance and searches for strange occurrences from all over the world.

In the first year, nothing happened.

In the second year, nothing happened.

In the third year, nothing happened.

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In the thirteenth year, nothing happened either.

More and more people were starting to believe that, perhaps, the YiLing Patriarch actually perished.

Even if he was capable of turning the world upside down, it was finally his turn to be toppled over.

Nobody would remain at the top for all of eternity—legends were only legends.

Chapter 2: Reincarnation

Wei WuXian received a kick just as he opened his eyes.

A voice thundered beside his ear, “Stop playing dead!”

The kick threw him backward, head first onto the ground. Fighting the urge to vomit, a thought formed in his head—

It was his first time hearing a human voice in quite a few years, let alone such a loud, fierce shriek. His head swirled and ears buzzed with the echoes of the voice, “Whose land do you think you’re living on? Whose rice are you eating? Whose money are you spending? What’s wrong with taking a few of your belongings? Everything you own should be mine, anyways!”

Aside from this adolescent, duck-like voice, there were also the of ransacking chests and smashing objects. His eyes gradually cleared up.

A dimly-lit ceiling appeared in his sight, followed by a slant-browed person with a sickly composition, drenching him with spittle, “How dare you tell Father and Mother? Did you really think that anybody in this house is going to listen to you? You actually thought I was scared of you!”

A few servant-like hunks shifted over, “Young Master, everything has been smashed!”

The young master asked, “How did you finish it so quickly?”

A manservant replied, “There’s nothing much inside this shack anyways.”

The young master seemed to be quite pleased, poking Wei WuXian forcefully on the nose, “You dared to tell on me, and look at you now, playing dead on the ground! For whom? As if anyone actually wants these piles of junk! Now that I’ve smashed everything, let’s see how you’re gonna tell on me in the future! Are you proud of yourself just because you’ve studied cultivation for a few years? Well, how does it feel when you’ve been kicked back home like a stray dog?”

Wei WuXian thought wearily.

actually

The young master let out enough anger by kicking the person and wrecking the house, and strutted out with his two manservants, slamming the door with a “bang”. He shouted his orders, “Watch carefully. Don’t let him outside anytime this month, or he’ll make a fool of himself again!”

As the group went away, silence fell upon the room. Wei WuXian thought about getting up.

Despite his effort, his limbs failed to uphold themselves, so he lay down again. He turned on his side, staring dizzily at the strange environment and the mess on the ground.

A bronze mirror rested on the side, probably thrown onto the ground. Wei WuXian grabbed it and looked into the mirror, only to see a ghastly pale face, with two asymmetrical piles of red on each side of his cheek. Add a blood-red tongue onto the features, and he would look like a hanged ghost. He tossed the mirror to the side and wiped his face, finding his hand covered in a white powder.

Fortunately, the body wasn’t born this way—it was only one of the owner’s penchants. He was no-doubt a man, yet he was covered with makeup (not to mention, badly applied makeup). How unbearable!

Taken back by the shock, some energy came back to him, and he finally sat up, noticing the circular array beneath him.

The array was scarlet in color and crooked in shape, appearing to have been drawn by hand, using blood as a medium, still damp and emitting a strong scent. The array was filled with warped scribbled incantations, which were somewhat smudged by his body, but came across as gruesome nonetheless.

After all, Wei WuXian was known as the Supreme Leader and the Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation, so he was most certainly accustomed to vile-looking arrays such as this one.

It turned out that, in fact, he did not seize the body of another—he was offered one.

It was an ancient, forbidden technique. Compared to an , it resembled a curse more. The caster of the array would injure themselves by creating incisions on their body, then draw the array, writing incantations using their own blood and finishing by sitting in the center of the

array. They could then summon an extremely villainous ghoul and ask for it to complete their wish. The price to pay was to offer their body to the evil spirit, with their own soul returning back to Earth.

This was the forbidden technique opposite to stealing another's body—offering one's body.

Due to the grave sacrifices, only a few people were brave enough to put it into effect. After all, there were hardly any wishes strong enough for a living person to willingly sacrifice everything that they owned. Over thousands of years, only three or four examples had been proven to be true and recorded by history. Without exception, the people's wishes were the same—to take revenge.

Wei WuXian refused to accept this.

Why would he be put into the category of "extremely villainous ghouls"?

Although his reputation wasn't great and died in a horrifying way, he neither haunted the living nor sought vengeance. He could swear that one couldn't find another wandering ghost as harmless as him.

The difficult part was that, as soon as the evil spirit had taken over the body of the caster, the contract was sealed by default. The evil spirit must grant their wish, or else the curse would cause a backlash. The spirit in possession of the body would be completely annihilated, never to be born again!

Wei WuXian raised his hands to find that, unsurprisingly, both of his wrists were crisscrossed with multiple cuts. He proceeded to take off his belt. Under the black clothes, his chest and stomach areas were also covered with what seemed to be lacerations from a sharp tool. Although the bleeding had stopped, Wei WuXian knew that these weren't normal wounds. If he didn't fulfil the wish of the body's owner, the wounds would not be able to heal. It would worsen as time went on, and if the time limit ended, both his soul and this body would be ripped apart.

Wei WuXian confirmed his situation several times, repeating, "How can this happen to me?" in his heart even more times, and could finally stand upright, leaning against the wall.

Even though the house was large in size, it was empty and shabby, with sheets and blankets looking like they hadn't been changed in a long while. There was a bamboo basket in the corner. It was supposed to be for storing trash, but, having been kicked over earlier, the scraps all tumbled out onto the ground. Wei WuXian scanned around the room and picked up a crumpled

piece of paper. He unfolded it and was surprised to see it crammed with words. He hurriedly gathered all of the paper.

The words on the papers must have been written by the owner of this body to vent when he felt stressed. Some sentences were incoherent and disordered, and anxiety leapt off of the page through the distorted handwriting. Wei WuXian read through every single piece of paper, and began to notice that something was wrong.

He took a few guesses and roughly understood the state of things.

It turned out to be that the owner of this body was named Mo XuanYu. His location was called Mo Village.

Mo XuanYu's grandfather was from a rich family of the area. His family was few in number, and, although he tried for a son, he only had two daughters. Their names were not mentioned, but the elder one was the daughter of his principal wife, looking for a husband to marry into the family, while the younger one was the daughter of a servant. The Mo family originally wanted to hastily give her to someone, but an adventure awaited her. When she was sixteen, the leader of a well-known cultivation family passed by the area, and fell in love with her at first sight.

Everyone admired cultivators. Cultivation families, in the eyes of common folk, were like people favored by God, mysterious yet noble. In the beginning, the people of Mo Village regarded the topic with contempt, but because the often helped out, the Mo family received plenty of advantages. And so, the direction of the discussions changed, and the Mo family took pride in the matter, while everyone else also envied the opportunity. The second-lady of Mo bore one son for the leader—Mo XuanYu.

But, not for long, since the Sect Leader was only involved with her to experiment with something new, he grew tired of it in a few years. After Mo XuanYu turned four, his father never came back again.

Gradually, the opinions of the Mo Village's people changed again. The original contempt and scorn returned, alongside with disdainful pity.

The second-lady of Mo did not want to accept this. She firmly believed that the sect leader would not turn a deaf ear to his own son. Sure enough, when Mo XuanYu turned fourteen, the Sect Leader took him back.

The second-lady stuck her nose up in the air again, and told everyone that her son would most certainly become an as fast as he could, bringing glory to his ancestors.

However, before Mo XuanYu achieved success in cultivation and inherited his father's position, he was driven back.

On top of that, he was driven back shamefully.

Mo XuanYu was homosexual, and had enough nerve to harass the other disciples. The scandal was revealed to the public and, as he had few achievements in terms of cultivation, there were no reasons for him to stay in the sect.

Like adding frost to snow, aside from the event itself, when Mo XuanYu returned, he often behaved in a crazy manner, almost as if his life was scared out of him.

The story was almost too complex to be put into words. Wei WuXian's eyebrows twitched.

Not only a lunatic, a homosexual lunatic as well.

That explained why there were enough rouge and powder on his face to make him look like a hanged ghost, and also why nobody was surprised at the large, bloody array on the ground. Even if Mo XuanYu painted the whole room red with blood, from the tiles on the ground to the walls to the ceiling, the others wouldn't be overly surprised. After all, everyone knew that his head had a screw loose!

After he went back home dejectedly, he was bombarded with ridicule. The situation seemed like it was beyond redemption, and the second-lady of Mo, unable to withstand the blow, shortly choked to death due to the trauma.

At this time, Mo XuanYu's grandfather had already passed away. The first-lady of Mo was in charge of the family, but, ever since a young age, she had been unable to stand her younger sister, including her sister's son. She had only one child, Mo ZiYuan, who happened to be the person who ransacked the place earlier. When Mo XuanYu was taken away by his father, the first-lady was jealous, and wanted to have even the slightest relationship with a cultivation sect. She hoped that the cultivator who came would take Mo ZiYuan to cultivate as well.

Of course, she was refused, or rather, ignored.

This was most certainly not a case of selling cabbage. One simply couldn't bargain, much less buy one and get another for free.

Strangely confident, this family all held the thought that Mo ZiYuan had a lot of potential and talent. They believed that if, back then, he was sent instead, he would have won recognition from the sect, unlike his disappointing cousin. Although, when Mo XuanYu left, Mo ZiYuan was still young, he was repeatedly instilled with nonsense such as this, and believed in them wholeheartedly. Every two or three days, he would find Mo XuanYu and humiliate him, cursing him for snatching his road to cultivation. At the same time, he found great interest in the talismans, elixirs, and magical tools, regarding all of them as his possessions and doing whatever he wanted with them.

Although Mo XuanYu often switched in and out of being a maniac, he did understand that he was degraded by others. He tolerated it, but Mo ZiYuan further intensified his behavior, almost emptying Mo XuanYu's whole room. His patience had finally drained out and he complained to his aunt and uncle, causing Mo ZiYuan's commotion from this morning.

The words on the paper were small and compact, hurting Wei WuXian's eyes. He thought to himself, "How fucked up is this person's life?"

No wonder Mo XuanYu would rather use the forbidden technique to sacrifice his body and ask villainous ghouls to take revenge.

The pain from his eyes transferred to his head. Supposedly, to use the forbidden technique, the caster would chant their wish silently. As the evil spirit being summoned, Wei WuXian should have been able to hear his specific requirements.

However, it was likely that Mo XuanYu secretly copied fragmented excerpts of the technique, resulting in him skipping this step. Wei WuXian guessed that he wanted to take revenge on the Mo family, but how should he do it? To what extent? To retrieve the items that were taken from him? Or to beat up everyone of the Mo surname?

Or… to wipe out the entire family?

In all likelihood, it was probably to wipe out the entire family. After all, anyone who touched upon the cultivation world would know what phrases were used most often to describe him—ungrateful, eccentric, indifferent to his own relatives, intolerable by the rule of Heaven, and other spectacular terms. Was there anyone else more "villainous" than him? If Mo XuanYu had dared to summon him specifically, the wish was most likely not an easily fulfilled one.

Wei WuXian couldn't help but sigh, "You've got the wrong person…"

Translator's Notes

: A magical formation drawn on the ground to cast spells and such.

: The leader of an organization dedicated towards the practice of cultivation.

: Humans who gained immortality from cultivational practices.

Chapter 3: Aggression—Part One

Wei WuXian wanted to wash his face so that he could gaze upon the face of his body's owner, but there wasn't any water in the room, not even for drinking or washing. The only basin-like container was probably, he suspected, for lavatory purposes instead of cleansing.

He pushed the door, but it was fastened with a latch, most likely to prevent him from wandering outside. None of these things made him feel the joy of reincarnation at all!

He figured that he might as well sit in the and get used to his new home. Time flew by, and the day had passed. When he opened his eyes, sunlight seeped inside from the gaps of the door and windows. Although he could stand up and walk around, his still felt lightheaded.

Wei WuXian was puzzled, ! "
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Then, a noise came from his stomach, and he realized that this wasn't related to his spiritual powers at all. In fact, it was because this body had not practiced inedia and felt hunger. If he didn't scavenge for food, he might become the first villainous ghoul who starved to death upon arrival.

Wei WuXian lifted his foot and was about to kick the door open, when, suddenly, the sound of footsteps approached. Someone stomped on the door and grunted, "It's mealtime!"

Nonetheless, there was no indication of the door being opened. Wei WuXian lowered his head and saw a miniature door with a small bowl set in front of it on the bottom of this one opening.

The servant outside shouted again, "Chop-chop! What are you waiting for? Take the bowl out after you finish!"

The door was slightly smaller than the kind for dogs to crawl through. It didn't allow the passage of humans, but bowls could be easily pushed inside. There were two dishes and one serving of rice, which looked quite unpleasant.

Wei WuXian played with the pair of chopsticks that were stuck into the rice, feeling quite bitter.

The YiLing Patriarch had just returned to the mortal world, but the first things he came upon were a kick and a scolding, not to mention the leftovers that served as his welcoming-meal.

Where were the blood and gore? The ruthless slaughter? The absolute destruction? Who would have believed him? He was like the tiger in a flatland, the dragon in shallow water, the phoenix without feathers, losing his advantage and belittled by those weaker than him.

Then, the servant outside spoke again, but with laughter this time, “ -Ding! Come here!”

The sweet voice of a girl answered from a distance, “A-Tong, are you delivering the meal to the one in there again?”

A-Tong clicked his tongue, “Why else would I come to this ominous courtyard?”

A-Ding’s voice sounded closer, as if she was in front of the door, “You just deliver one meal a day, and nobody cares if you’re lazy. This is such an idle task, yet you think it’s ominous. Look at me. I’m so busy, to the point that I can’t even go outside to play.”

A-Tong complained, “Delivering his meal is not the work I do! How can you dare to go outside these days? With so many walking corpses out there, everyone’s locking themselves in their houses.”

Wu WuXian squatted by the door and listened as he ate.

It appeared to be that, ever since a while ago, the Mo Village hadn’t been peaceful. Walking corpses, like their name, were dead people who could move, a type of low-level .
Unless the deceased person held strong resentment, they were usually dull-eyed and sluggish. They weren’t overly dangerous, but they were enough to alarm the average person, especially with their vomit-inducing stench.

However, to Wei WuXian, they were the most obeying puppets. When he heard them being mentioned, he even felt a sense of familiarity.

A-Tong seemed to be making a face, “If you want to go outside, you’ll have to take me so that I can protect you…”

A-Ding replied, “You? Protect me? Stop bragging. Are you sure you can defeat those things?”

A-Tong said bitterly, “If I can’t defeat them, other people can’t either.”

A-Ding laughed, “How do you know that other people can’t defeat them? Let me tell you—today, some cultivators came to Mo Village. I heard that they were from a very prominent sect! The madame is talking to them in the main hall, and everyone in town is watching. Can’t you

hear the noise? I don't have time to play around with you; they might give me more work afterwards."

Wei WuXian listened attentively. Sure enough, the faint bustling sounds of people came from the east. He pondered for a moment, stood up, and kicked on the door. It cracked with a .

At that moment, the two servants, A-Ding and A-Tong, were flirting with each other, and they screamed as the door suddenly flung open. Wei WuXian threw away his bowl and walked outside, flinching from the glare of the sunlight. He brought his hand to the tip of his brow and closed his eyes for a moment. Just now, A-Tong screamed even louder than A-Ding, but as he took a closer look and realized that it was Mo XuanYu, the person whom everyone could humiliate, his courage came back to him. He figured that he probably lost face in front of A-Ding, and wanted to make up for it, so he jumped over and waved his hands like he was reproaching a dog, "Shoo! Shoo! Go away! Why did you come out?"

A-Tong treated him even worse than treating a beggar or a fly. Most of the time, all of the Mo family's servants treated Mo XuanYu like this because he never resisted. Wei WuXian gave A-Tong a light kick, knocking him over, and laughed, "How daring of a mere errand-running child to humiliate others like this."

With that, he headed toward the commotion in the east. Quite a lot of people crowded in and around the East Hall. Just as Wei WuXian stepped into the courtyard, a woman spoke in a voice a few pitches louder than the others', "A member from the younger generations of our family used to be a cultivator as well…"

It must have been Madame Mo trying to make connections with the cultivation family again. Wei WuXian didn't wait for her to finish speaking, and quickly hustled through the crowd, into the hall, and grinned, "I'm coming, I'm coming. Right here!"

A middle-aged lady sat in the hall, with well-maintained health and wearing extravagant clothing. She was Madame Mo. Her husband sat below her, and the opposite side sat a few white-robed . Because of how an unkempt freak just appeared from within the crowd, all of the chatter came to a halt. Despite this, Wei WuXian spoke shamelessly, as if he did not notice the motionless atmosphere at all, "Who was calling me earlier? I am the only one who use to be a cultivator!"

There was too much powder on his face, and as he smiled, the powder sprinkled off. A younger cultivator was on the brink of laughing, letting out a sound. His face grew serious again as another one, seemingly the leader of the group, gave him a disapproving look.

Wei WuXian followed the voice and scanned the hall. He thought that the servants were being ignorant and exaggerated the situation, but he was surprised to see that they were really disciples of a “prominent sect”.

Wearing drifting sleeves and flowing belts, the boys were doubtlessly a treat to the eyes. Looking at the uniform, it was obvious that they were from the GusuLan . They must have also been younger generations of blood-relationship to the Lan , as they all wore white forehead ribbons of around a finger’s width, with a cloud motif sewn onto them.

The motto of the GusuLan Sect was “righteousness”. The forehead ribbon implied for the disciples to “conduct oneself well”, and the cloud motif was the official motif of the Lan clan, of which cultivators who came from other clans did not have the right to wear. Wei WuXian got toothaches whenever he saw anybody from the Lan Sect. In his past life, he had always thought of that sect’s uniform as “mourning clothes”, which was why he would never mistake it.

Madame Mo hadn’t seen this nephew of hers in a while and only got over her dismay after a long time, after she realized who the heavily-makeuped person was. She was furious, but she didn’t want to lose her temper and discompose herself, so she lowered her voice at her husband, “Who let him out? Get him back in there!”

Her husband promptly smiled to calm her and walked over with an irksome look, ready to pull him out of here. However, Wei WuXian suddenly dropped to the ground, his limbs tightly clinging to the floor. Nobody could get him up, even after more servants were called to help.

As Madame Mo’s face darkened bit by bit, her husband was also sweating. He scolded, “...You… damn madman! If you don’t go back now, wait and see how I’ll punish you!”

Although everyone in the Mo Village knew that the Mo family had a young master who lost his marbles, Mo XuanYu had already hidden in that dark room for a couple of years, scared to come outside. After seeing how both his face and actions were like those of a monster’s, the people whispered among themselves, looking forward to a good show.

Wei WuXian spoke, “I could go back if you want me to,” he pointed at Mo ZiYuan, “but tell him to return the things he stole from me first.”

Mo ZiYuan did not expect that the good-for-nothing lunatic had the guts to cause trouble here, even after his disciplining yesterday. His face grew pale, “That’s nonsense! When did I ever steal your things? W-would I need to steal anything from you?”

Wei WuXian said, “Yeah, yeah. You didn’t steal; you robbed!”

Madame Mo didn't say anything yet, but Mo ZiYuan was furious, raising his foot to kick him. However, a white-robed boy carrying a sword moved his finger slightly, and Mo ZiYuan slipped, falling to the ground with his foot only scraping him. Even so, Wei WuXian still rolled on the ground, as if he really had been kicked over, and pulled open the front of his robe, showing the footprint that Mo ZiYuan made yesterday.

The others thought that, obviously, Mo XuanYu couldn't have kicked himself. Along with the fact that Mo ZiYuan had always been imprudent and arrogant, who else could have done it? No matter what, the Mo family was being too ruthless to their own blood relative. It was plain to see that, when he first came back, he wasn't this insane, and so it must have been worsened by the people of this family. Nevertheless, all was well as long as there was a good show to watch. This one was much more interesting than the cultivators!

Before this, Madame Mo ignored him, as she didn't bother to argue with a sick person. She ordered the others to take him out. Now, she knew—Mo XuanYu had definitely come prepared. His head was completely clear and he disgraced them on purpose. She felt both shock and hatred, "You're making the scene on purpose, aren't you?"

Wei WuXian replied blankly, "He stole my belongings, and I'm here to retrieve them. Does that also count as making a scene?"

With so many pairs of eyes staring, Madame Mo could neither hit him nor throw him out. Anger welled up deep inside her, and she could only forcefully compromise the two sides, "Stealing? Robbing? That's a bit disrespectful, if you ask me. We are all part of one family, and he only wanted to take a look at them. A-Yuan is your younger brother, so what's wrong with taking a few of your things? As an older brother, you shouldn't be reluctant to lend one or two playthings, it's not as if he won't return them."

The boys from the Lan Sect stared speechlessly at one another. These young boys grew up in a cultivation clan, exposed to splendor and that only. They had probably never seen farces like this before or even heard of this kind of logic. Wei WuXian laughed hysterically in his mind, and extended his hand, "Then, return them."

Of course, it was impossible for Mo ZiYuan to return anything, having either thrown them out or disassembled them. Even if he were able to return them, his pride wouldn't have allowed it. His face turned purple with anger and he shouted, "... Mom!" His glare raged, #
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Madame Mo glowered at him, signaling for him to not worsen the situation. However, Wei WuXian spoke again, “Not only should he not have stolen my belongings, he shouldn’t have stolen them in the middle of the night. Everyone knows that I am into men. Even if he wasn’t ashamed, I know to not look suspicious.”

Madame Mo gasped and shouted, “What are you talking about, in front of the villagers? How shameless—A-Yuan is your cousin!”

In terms of running wild, Wei WuXian was definitely a master. In the past, if he wanted to run wild, he would have had to keep his status in mind. But, now, he was a lunatic anyway, which meant that he could do whatever he wanted to whichever way he wanted. He stiffened his neck and argued defiantly, “Even though he knew that I was his cousin, he chose to not avoid me, so who was more shameless? I don’t care about your reputation, but don’t ruin my innocence! I still want to find a good man!”

Mo ZiYuan let out a loud scream and started to swing a chair at him. As soon as Wei WuXian saw that his anger finally went out of control, he rolled over and climbed up, dodging so that the chair only smashed on the ground, falling apart in the process. The people in the East Hall were originally gloating at the disgrace of the Mo family, but, after the fight started, they’d all fled away. Wei WuXian bolted toward the group of boys from the Lan Clan, who all gaped at the scene, and yelled, “Did everyone see that? Did you? The burglar is also beating someone up! How heartless!”

Mo ZiYuan chased him and came close to pouncing on him when the leader of the boys hurriedly stopped him, “Please calm down. Words are more powerful than weapons.”

Madame Mo saw that the boy was deliberately protecting the lunatic, and pulled a wary smile, “This is my younger sister’s son. He’s not so bright up ; everyone from the Mo Village knows that he is a lunatic, and often speaks strange words that shouldn’t be taken seriously. Cultivator, please…”

Before she finished her sentence, Wei WuXian’s head peeked from behind the boy’s back and glared, “Who said that my words shouldn’t be taken seriously? Next time, try stealing anything from me again. You steal once, and I cut off one of your hands!”

Mo ZiYuan was originally held down by his father, but, after hearing this, he was close to losing his temper again. Wei WuXian lept outside quickly, and the boy blocked the entrance at once, switching to another topic in a serious tone, “Then, we will borrow the West Courtyard for the night. Please remember the things that I’ve talked about—after nightfall, close all of the windows, don’t come outside, or worse, walk toward the courtyard.”

Madame Mo was shaking from anger, “Yes, yes, please…”

Mo ZiYuan found it beyond belief, “Mom! The lunatic insulted me in front of so many people, and that’s it? You told me before; you told me that he was only a…”

Madame Mo commanded, “Be quiet. Can’t you wait until we go back?”

Mo ZiYuan had never been at such a disadvantage or been disgraced like this before, with his mother’s scolding making the situation worse. He was full of hatred, and thought,

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After Wei WuXian finished flipping out, he walked out the door of the Mo family’s place and showed his face around the Mo village. Although he surprised countless people, he was, in fact, loving every second of it, and finally realized the delight of being a lunatic. He was even starting to approve of the makeup that resembled a hanged ghost, almost unwilling to wash it away. He fixed his hair and looked at his wrists. The cuts didn’t seem like they were healing at all, which meant that a slight revenge like this was not approved by the forbidden technique.

Would he really have to eliminate the Mo family?

To be honest, it wouldn’t be too difficult of a task.

Wei WuXian strolled back to the Mo family’s West Courtyard. The disciples of the Lan Clan were standing on top of the roofs and walls, discussing with solemn looks on their faces.

Although the GusuLan Sect contributed greatly during the siege on him, at that time, these juniors were either not born yet or still young children. He shouldn’t direct his hate towards them, so Wei WuXian decided to linger around and observe what they were going to do. After a while, he felt like something was wrong.

Why did the fluttering black flags on top of the roofs and walls look so familiar to him?

These types of flags were called the “Phantom Attraction Flags”. If one was set on a living person, it would attract all of the spirits, ghosts, moving corpses, or evil beings within a certain area, so that they would only attack that person. Since the flag-bearing person would have been turned into a living target, it was also called the “Target Flag.” It could also be set on a house, but the house needed to have living humans inside of it. Then, the attack range expanded to include everyone inside the house. Due to how there would always be a sinister energy that surrounded the area in which the flag was set in, as if there was a swirling black wind, they were

also called “Black Wind Flags”. Arranging the flag formation in the West Courtyard and not allowing anyone to approach them must have meant that they wanted to lead the Walking Corpses here and capture them in one go.

As for why they looked familiar… How could they have not come across as familiar? The creator of the Phantom Attraction Flags was none other than the YiLing Patriarch!

It seemed that, although the cultivation world hated him on the surface, they still used the inventions that he came up with.

A disciple standing on the roof saw him lingering around and spoke, “Please go back. This is not a place someone like you should come.”

Although he was being driven away, it was out of kindness, and the tone also differed from those of the servants in the Mo family. Wei WuXian caught him off guard and quickly hopped up, grabbing one of the flags.

The disciple was startled and jumped down to chase him, “Do not move. That is not something you should take.”

Wei WuXian yelled as he ran away, looking like a real lunatic, with his hair disheveled and limbs flinging about, “I’m not giving it back; I’m not giving it back! I want this thing! I want this!”

The disciple caught up to him in a few strides and grabbed his arm, “If you are not going to give it back, I am going to hit you!”

Wei WuXian held onto the flag, unwilling to let go of it. The leader of the boys was setting up the flag formation, and lightly hopped off the roof when he heard of the ruckus, “JingYi, cut it out. Do not make a fuss about it and just take the flag.”

Lan JingYi complained, “SiZhui, I did not actually hit him! Look at him, messing up the flag formation!”

During the tug-of-war, Wei WuXian had already checked over the Phantom Attraction Flag in his hands. The motifs were drawn correctly and the incantations were complete. There weren’t any errors, so nothing would go wrong while using them. However, the person who drew on the flag was lacking in experience, so it would only attract evil beings and moving corpses from within twenty-five hundred meters. That should be enough, though. There shouldn’t be any malicious creatures in a place as small as the Mo Village.

Lan SiZhui smiled at him, “Young Master Mo, the sky is growing dark, and we are going to start capturing the walking corpses soon. It will be dangerous at night time, so it would be best for you to return to your room.”

Wei WuXian looked him over. He was fair and refined, with a dignified appearance and smiling faintly. Wei WuXian silently approved of him. The flag formation was set in an organized way, and his mannerisms were also respectful, making him a disciple with astonishing potential. He didn’t know, within a conservative clan such as the Lan Clan, who on Earth brought up such a junior.

Lan SiZhui spoke again, “This flag…”

Before he finished, Wei WuXian threw the Phantom Attraction Flag onto the ground and humphed, “It’s just a flag, so what’s the big deal? I can draw way better than this!”

He sprinted off the moment he threw the flag away. The boys who stood on the roof to watch the bustle almost fell off from their laughter, after hearing his ridiculous words. Lan JingYi also chuckled from the anger and picked up the Phantom Attraction Flag, “What a maniac!”

Wei WuXian continued to roam around, doing nothing, and finally moved back to the small courtyard that belonged to Mo XuanYu.

He ignored the broken bolt and the mess on the ground, picked a relatively clean spot, and sat in the lotus position again.

However, before daylight came, he was pulled out of meditation by noise from the outside.

A series of chaotic footsteps quickly approached, along with cries and screams. Wei WuXian heard a few phrases being repeated, “... Barge in and drag him out!”

“Notify the officers!”

“What do you mean ‘notify the officers’? Beat him to death!”

He opened his eyes to see that a few servants had already come in.

The whole courtyard was set alight with fire. Someone cried out, “Drag the insane murderer to the Main Hall and make him pay for it with his life!”

Translator's Notes

: A cross-legged position for meditation purposes.

The prefix "A" (pronounced "ah") can often be found in front of the names of children or servants.

: a corpse that had become alive, usually due to human interference.

: In this case, the word "boys" refers to older youths in their teenage years.

A sect is an organization for cultivation that may or may not be related by blood, while a is a cultivation family related by blood. This means that GusuLan is a sect, with the Lan clan being the leaders of the sect. This is what Wei WuXian referred to as he was talking about the uniforms of the disciples who came—only those part of the clan are allowed to wear cloud patterns, excluding the common members of the sect.

Chapter 4: Aggression—Part Two

Wei WuXian's first thought was that something went wrong with the flag formation that the boys set up.

His inventions needed to be used extremely carefully, or else disasters could happen. This was also why he went to check if there was anything wrong with the motifs that were drawn. As a few pairs of big hands came to drag him outside, Wei WuXian straightened his body and allowed them to do so without difficulty, so that he wouldn't have to walk by himself. The East Hall was bustling with people, almost more crowded than when the villagers of Mo Village gathered here.

All of the servants and relatives were present. Some were still in their undergarments and didn't yet have the time to brush their hair, but everyone looked terrified. Madame Mo was collapsed in her seat, as if she had just woke up from a swoon. The streaks of tears could be seen on her cheeks, and tears still lingered in her eyes. But, as Wei WuXian was dragged inside, her sorrowful gaze immediately became hateful.

A human-shaped object lay on the ground, with its body covered by a white cloth and only the head being revealed. Lan SiZhui and the other boys wore heavy expressions, bending down to check the situation and talking in soft voices. The conversation leaked into Wei WuXian's ears.

"... Less than three minutes had passed since the body was discovered?"

"After subduing the walking corpse, we hurried from the West Courtyard to the East Courtyard, and found the corpse by the hallway."

The human-shaped thing was, apparently, Mo ZiYuan. Wei WuXian took one glance at it, and couldn't help but to look again.

The corpse looked like Mo ZiYuan in some ways, but unlike him in other ways. Although the features were clearly that of his petty cousin, the cheekbones were deeply sunken, eyes bulging, and skin wrinkled. Compared to the youthful Mo ZiYuan before this, it was as if he aged twenty years. It also seemed like his blood and flesh were sucked from him, turning him into a skeleton with only a thin layer of skin on the outside. If, before this, Mo ZiYuan was just ugly, now, his corpse was both old and ugly.

As Wei WuXian was scrutinizing the corpse, Madame Mo suddenly rushed towards him, with a gleaming dagger in her hand. Being light on his feet, Lan SiZhui quickly knocked the dagger

away. Before he had a chance to talk, Madame Mo shrieked at him, “My son died a tragic death, so I am only avenging him! What are you stopping me for?”

Wei WuXian hid behind Lan SiZhui’s back again, and spoke while squatting, “How does your son’s tragic death concern me?”

During the day, Lan SiZhui saw Wei WuXian make a scene in the East Hall, and, afterwards, he also heard a lot of exaggerated rumours from other people. He felt extremely sympathetic to the invalid, and couldn’t help but to take his side, “Madame Mo, seeing from your son’s condition, his flesh and essence have been drawn out of him, which means that he was killed by evil beings, not .”

Madame Mo’s chest heaved, “You know nothing! The lunatic’s father was a cultivator. He must have learned a lot of demonic spells from him!”

Lan SiZhui turned around to look at the seemingly dull-witted Wei WuXian, and spoke again, “Uhm, Madame, there is a lack of evidence, so…”

“The evidence is on my son!” Madame Mo pointed at the corpse on the ground, “Look for yourselves! A-Yuan’s remains already told me who murdered him!”

Not needing other people to do it, Wei WuXian lifted the white cloth by himself, from the head down to the feet. There was something missing from Mo ZiYuan’s dead body.

His left arm, severed from below his shoulder, had disappeared!

Madame Mo spoke, “Do you see this? Everyone who was here heard what the lunatic said, right? He said that, if A-Yuan touched his belongings again, he would cut off his hand!”

After the burst of emotion, she covered her face and sobbed, “...My poor A-Yuan… Although he didn’t do anything to him at all, he was not only framed, but also killed as well… The lunatic is out of his mind...”

Out of his mind!

It had been a few years since he last heard the phrase being used to describe him, so it was quite cordial. Wei WuXian pointed at himself, but no words came to him. He didn’t know if he was the ill one or if it was Madame Mo. When he was younger, he talked quite a lot about exterminating entire clans and sects, killing millions of people, creating rivers of blood, and other cruel actions. But, most of the time, they were empty words. If he could actually do the

things that he said, he would have long been dominating the cultivation world. Madame Mo's true intention wasn't to avenge for him, but to find someone to let out her resentment on.

Wu WuXian didn't want to be bothered with her. He thought for a moment, and stuck his hand into Mo ZiYuan's sleeve. He fished around for a moment and pulled something out, unfolding it in front of him. Surprisingly, it was a Phantom Attraction Flag.

Instantly, he realized what was going on, and uttered under his breath, $

When Lan SiZhui and the others saw what was taken out of Mo ZiYuan's sleeve, they also understood the situation. Associating this with the farce that happened today, the cause was easy to guess. During the day, Mo ZiYuan lost face because of Mo XuanYu's crazy behavior and loathed him, still wanting to square up with him. However, Mo XuanYu wandered outside for a long while, so Mo ZiYuan planned to sneak up on him at night, when he would be returning.

When night had fallen, he secretly went outside, and was passing the West Courtyard when he saw the Phantom Attraction Flags on the walls. Although he was repeatedly told not to go outside or near the West Courtyard at night, and especially to stay away from these black flags, Mo ZiYuan thought that he was told to do so because they were scared of people stealing the valuable weapons. He had no idea about the dangerous effects of these Phantom Attraction Flags, or that if he held it, he would be turned into a living target. He got addicted to stealing his cousin's talismans and magic tools, and he would always itch to take odd items like this, not giving up until he obtained it. Therefore, when the owners of the flags were subduing walking corpses in the West Courtyard, he quietly took one.

The flag formation utilized six flags, of which five were set in the West Courtyard, with the boys from the Lan family as baits. However, they were all carrying countless magic tools on them, and, although Mo ZiYuan only took a single flag, he didn't have any tools for protection on him. It was common sense to pick on the weak, so the evil beings would naturally be attracted to him. If there were only walking corpses, then it wouldn't matter too much. Even if he was bitten, he wouldn't die immediately and could still be saved. Unfortunately, the Phantom Attraction Flag accidentally attracted something worse than a walking corpse. The unknown being was what killed Mo ZiYuan and took his arm!

Wei WuXian raised his wrist. Sure enough, one of the cuts on his right hand had healed. It looked like that he had scored a lucky hit—the sacrificial contract had already deemed the death of Mo ZiYuan as his doing.

Madame Mo was well aware of her son's foibles, but she wasn't willing to admit that Mo ZiYuan caused his own death. Due to impatience and rage, she grabbed a teacup and threw it in

the direction of Wei WuXian's head, "If you didn't frame him in front of so many people yesterday, would he go out in the middle of the night? It's all your fault, you son of a bitch!"

Wei WuXian saw it coming, and dodged to the side. Madame Mo turned toward Lan SiZhui and screeched, "And you! You bunch of useless fools! You cultivate and ward off evil spirits, but you can't even protect him! A-Yuan was still a child*!"

*The actual word used here meant "from ten-years-old to nineteen-years-old", but, although they say "in one's twenties", people don't say "in one's tens", so the word was replaced by "a child" instead.

The boys were still young. They hadn't been outside much and were too inexperienced to find anything wrong with the area, which was why they felt sorry for not detecting an evil being as fierce as this one. Nonetheless, after Madame Mo's senseless scolding, they all looked blue in the face. After all, they grew up in a prominent family, so nobody dared to treat them like this. The GusuLan Sect was extremely strict to its disciples, forbidding violence against the powerless everymen, not even allowing disrespect. Therefore, even if they felt displeased, they had to keep everything down with dark expressions.

However, Wei WuXian couldn't stand it any longer, and thought,

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He spat loudly and spoke, "Who do you think you're taking out your anger on? Did you really see them as your servants? They travelled far and wide to come here and exorcise evil spirits for you without taking a penny. Do they owe you anything? How old is your son? He should be at least seventeen, and so, how is he still a 'child'? How young of a child does he have to be to not understand basic human language? Did they or did they not repeatedly instruct him to not touch anything in the formation and not approach the West Courtyard? Your son snuck outside at night on his own. Is it my fault? Or is it his?"

Lan JingYi and the others let out a breath of air, faces not so dark anymore. Madame Mo was both extremely mournful and resentful, and all she could think about was the word "death". Not her own death so that she could be with her son, but the deaths of everyone in the world, especially the ones in front of her right now. She had a habit of ordering her husband to do everything, and so she knocked him, "Call everyone! Call everyone inside!"

Even so, her husband was in a trance. Possibly because of the trauma from his only child passing away, he went as far as to backhandedly push her. It caught Madame Mo by surprise, and she fell onto the ground.

In the past, Madame Mo didn't even need to push him. If she just raised her voice, he would comply immediately. How could he dare to strike back today?

The servants were all scared out of their wits from her expression. A-Ding helped her up while quivering. Madame Mo clutched her chest and spoke in a trembling voice, "You… You… You, get out of here as well!"

Her husband seemed like he didn't hear anything. A-Ding gave a few looks to A-Tong, and A-Tong hurriedly helped his master to walk outside. The East Hall was in chaos. As Wei WuXian saw that the family had finally been silenced, he intended to examine the corpse again. However, before he took another look at it, another high-pitched scream pierced through the air. It was from the courtyard.

The people in the hall all rushed outside. On the ground of the East Courtyard, there were two twitching bodies. The first was that of A-Tong's, still alive, collapsed on the ground. The other fallen body was wrinkled and withered, as if the blood and the flesh had been emptied dry. The left arm was already gone, but no blood came out of the wound. The condition of the corpse was the same as Mo ZiYuan's.

Madame Mo brushed off A-Ding's supporting hand a second ago, but as she saw the corpse on the ground, her eyes widened, and she was finally out of energy to throw another fit. As she fainted, Wei WuXian happened to be next to her, and gave her a hand, passing her to A-Ding, who came running. He looked at his right hand to see that another one of the cuts were also gone.

It was merely a few seconds before they walked over the threshold of the hall, not even past the East Courtyard yet, and saw Madame Mo's husband die distressingly. Lan SiZhui, Lan JingYi, and the others also grew pale in the face. Lan SiZhui was the first to calm down and asked A-Tong, who lay on the ground, "Did you see what it was?"

A-Tong was almost scared to death, unable to open his mouth. Even after a few moments of asking, A-Tong still couldn't answer, and only shook his head repeatedly. Lan SiZhui was burning with anxiety. He asked another disciple to take him back inside, and turned to Lan JingYi, "Did you send the signal?"

Lan JingYi answered, "I did, but if there are no seniors who can assist us in the area, it would take at least an hour for our people to come here. What should we do now? We don't even know what it was."

Of course, it would be impossible for them to leave. If the disciples of a sect only cared about their own well-being when facing evil spirits, it would not only be bringing disgrace upon the

sect, they themselves would also be ashamed to face others. The frightened people of the Mo family couldn't go either, because it was likely that the evil being was among them, so nothing would be gained from going away.

Lan SiZhui gritted his teeth, "Wait here, for the reinforcement!"

Now that the signal for help had been sent, other cultivators would come to aid them within a short period of time. To prevent things from getting out of hand, Wei WuXian should withdraw and keep away from the situation. If the persons who came happened to know him or fought with him before, it would be hard to say what was going to happen next.

However, with the curse, he couldn't leave Mo Village anytime soon. In addition, the being that was attracted here had taken the lives of two people within such a short amount of time, which meant that it must have been extremely vicious. If Wei WuXian left now, when the helpers arrived, the streets of Mo Village might be packed with corpses who lost their left arms, including a few disciples of blood relations to the GusuLan Sect as well.

After pondering for a moment, Wei WuXian told himself,

Chapter 5: Aggression—Part Three

The boys on the side were all young and inexperienced. However, although they all looked nervous, they strictly stuck to their positions and protected the Mo family's house, fixing talismans onto the walls. The servant named A-Tong was already carried into the hall. Lan SiZhui felt his pulse with his left hand and supported Madame Mo's back with his right. He couldn't save both of them at once, and was in a terrible fix when A-Tong crawled up from the ground.

A.Ding exclaimed, "A-Tong, you're awake!"

Before her face had the time to light up, A-Tong raised his left hand and clutched his own neck.

Seeing this, Lan SiZhui tapped on a few of his acupoints for three times. Wei WuXian knew that, although they looked gentle, the people from the Lan Clan had arm strength that were the opposite of gentle. With a force like this, it would be hard for anyone to move. However, A-Tong seemed like he didn't feel anything, and the grip of his left hand tightened, his expressions looking more painful and twisted. Lan JingYi proceeded to grab his left hand, but it was like breaking off a chunk of iron, having no effect at all. After a moment, a came from his neck, and A-Tong's head drooped down. His neck was already broken.

He actually strangled himself in front everyone's eyes!

Seeing the situation, A-Ding's voice wavered, "... A ghost! There's an invisible ghost here. It made A-Tong strangle himself!"

Her tone was sharp and her voice was shrill, making everyone's blood run cold, and so they believed it effortlessly. Wei WuXian's judgement happened to be the opposite—it wasn't a ferocious ghost.

He had examined the talismans that the boys chose; all of them were spirit-fending ones, and the East Hall was literally covered with them. If it really was a ferocious ghost, then, as it went into the East Hall, the talismans would have incinerated green flames. Yet, nothing was happening right now.

It was not the group of kids' fault for reacting too slow, but the creature was indeed cruel. The cultivation world had a strict definition for the category of "ferocious ghosts"—they had to kill at least one person a month and continue the behavior for at least three months. The criterion was set by Wei WuXian himself, and it was probably still being used. He was the best at dealing with this kind. To him, killing one person in seven days would be considered as a ferocious ghost who

killed frequently. This thing killed three people at once, and within such a short period of time. It would be hard for even a capable cultivator to think of a solution immediately, let alone these juniors who had just started their careers.

As he was thinking, the candlelight flickered. A sinister wind passed, and all of the lanterns and candles in the courtyard and the East Hall died out.

The moment the lights were extinguished, screams came from everywhere. Everyone pushed and pulled, wanting to escape as fast as they could, stumbling and falling in the process. Lan JingYi shouted, “Stay where you are and don’t run! I’m gonna catch whoever runs!”

He wasn’t merely saying this to alarm the people. In fact, evil beings loved to cause trouble in the dark and make profits in times of trouble. The worse the crying and chaos, the more likely it was to unknowingly attract danger. At times like this, being isolated or becoming nervous was extremely unsafe. However, everyone was frightened to death, so how could they still have ears for words like this? After a while, the East Hall grew quiet, with only a few light breaths and faint sobs. It was likely that only a few people were left.

Amidst the dark, a fire lit up suddenly. Lan SiZhui ignited a Flame Talisman.

The fire from the Flame Talisman would not be extinguished by sinister winds. He used the talisman to light up the candle again, and the rest of the boys went to comfort the others. Under the light, Wei WuXian casually looked at his wrists. Another cut had healed.

After looking, he suddenly realized that there was something wrong about the number of cuts.

Originally, he had two cuts on each of his wrists. One healed when Mo ZiYuan died, and another healed when Mo ZiYuan’s father died. The death of the servant, A-Tong, healed one more of the cuts. Adding it up, only three cuts should have healed, with the last cut being the deepest and most hate-filled one.

But, right now, no cuts remained on his wrists.

Wei WuXian knew that Madame Mo was definitely one of Mo XuanYu’s targets of vengeance. The longest and deepest cut was probably saved for her. Yet, it had disappeared.

Did Mo XuanYu suddenly reach a point of epiphany and let go of his hate? That’d be impossible. His soul had already been sacrificed as the price for summoning Wei WuXian. Only the death of Madame Mo could heal the wound.

His gaze slowly moved towards the pale-faced Madame Mo, who recently woke up and was surrounded by everyone.

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Wei WuXian was sure that something was already possessing Madame Mo's body. If the being wasn't a spirit, then what was it?

Suddenly, A-Ding cried, "Hand… His hand! A-Tong's hand!"

Lan SiZhui moved the Flame Talisman to above A-Tong's body. Sure enough, his left hand had disappeared as well.

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With lightning speed, Wei WuXian's mind became clear, with the being that was wrecking havoc and the missing left arms finally completing the puzzle. He promptly bursted out laughing.

Lan JingYi snapped, "You idiot! How can you still laugh in a situation like this?"

But, after a second thought, he knew that he was an idiot anyways, so what's the use of haggling over him?

Wei WuXian tugged at his sleeve, "No, no!"

Lan JingYi was annoyed, pulling his sleeve back, "What 'no'? You're not an idiot? Stop fooling around! Nobody has the time to pay attention to you."

Wei WuXian pointed at the corpses of Mo ZiYuan's father and A-Tong, which lay on the ground, and spoke, "These are not them."

Lan SiZhui stopped the fuming Lan JingYi and asked, "What do you mean by 'these are not them'?"

Wei WuXian stated solemnly, "This is not Mo ZiYuan's dad, and this is not A-Tong either."

With his makeup-covered face, the more solemn he looked, the more he seemed like an actual lunatic. Yet, surrounded by the dim candlelight, his words sent chills up everyone's backs. Lan SiZhui stared for a second, and asked in spite of himself, "Why?"

Wei WuXian exclaimed proudly, “Their hands. None of them were left-handed. I’m sure of this, because they’d always hit me with their right hands.”

Lan JingYi spat, running out of patience, “What are you being proud for? Look at how complacent you are!”

However, Lan SiZhui broke into a sweat. Thinking back, A-Tong had used his left hand to strangle himself, and Madame Mo’s husband also used his left hand to push his wife.

But, during the day, when Mo XuanYu was causing trouble in the East Hall, the two were rushing to get him out of there, both using their right hands. It was impossible for them to suddenly turn left-handed before they died.

Although he didn’t know why, in order to figure out what the creature was, they had to think in the direction of “left hands.” After Lan SiZhui realized this, he felt surprised and looked at Wei WuXian. He couldn’t help but to think, +

Wei WuXian only smiled. He knew that the hint was too deliberate, but he couldn’t have helped it. The good thing was that Lan SiZhui didn’t think too much about it either, and thought, " ! " "
His eyes moved away from him, passing A-Ding, who fainted from crying too much, and landed on Madame Mo.

His gaze travelled from her face down to her hands. Her arms were hanging down and were mostly hidden inside her sleeves, with only half of the fingers showing. Her right hand had fair, thin fingers, undoubtedly those of a woman who lived comfortably and never worked.

However, the fingers on her left hand were much longer than the ones on her right. They were also thicker. The knuckles were bent, full of power.

The hand isn’t that of a woman’s—it was a man’s hand!

Lan SiZhui commanded, “Take hold of her!”

A few boys grabbed Madame Mo. Lan SiZhui said “excuse me” and was prepared to slap down a talisman when Madame Mo’s left hand suddenly twisted in an absurd way, aiming for his throat.

Unless one’s bones had been broken, it was impossible for a living person to twist their arm like this. She attacked quickly, and was extremely close to grabbing onto his neck, when at the same

time, Lan JingYi shouted “hey” and threw himself in front of Lan SiZhui, blocking the hand for him.

A flash passed, and as soon as the arm grabbed Lan JingYi’s shoulder, green flames ignited on his arm, making it loosen its grip. Lan SiZhui escaped death, and was about to thank Lan JingYi for it, when he saw that half of the latter’s uniform had already been burnt to ashes, looking quite awkward. Lan JingYi took off the other half of his uniform and scolded, fuming with rage, “Why did you kick me, you lunatic? Did you want to kill me?”

Wei WuXian scampered away like a frightened rat, “It wasn’t me!”

It " him. Inside of the Lan Sect’s uniform jacket, there were compact stitchings of incantations using thin threads of the same color, included for protection. However, against strong ones like this, it could only be used once before it became invalid. During the emergency, he could only kick Lan JingYi and use his body to protect Lan SiZhui’s neck. Lan JingYi wanted to scold him again, but Madame Mo fell onto the ground, with all of the blood and flesh on her face being drained until only a thin layer of skin was left on the skull. The male arm that didn’t belong to her had fallen off her shoulders. Its fingers bent freely, as if it was stretching or exercising, and the throbs of its veins were clearly visible.

This was the evil being that the Phantom Attraction Flag had attracted.

Being dismembered was a classic example of a distressing death. It was only somewhat more dignified than the way Wei WuXian died. Unlike the situation of being crushed to powder, the limbs and parts of the corpse would be tainted with some of the resentment of the person who died, and it would want to reunite with the other parts and die with a whole corpse. Therefore, it would come up with strategies to find the other parts of the body. If it found it, it might be satisfied and rest in peace, or it might stir up more trouble. If it couldn’t find it, the body part would have to put up with the second best option.

What would the second best option be? It would have to make do with the bodies of living humans.

It was like this left hand—eat the left hand of a living person, and replace it. After draining all of the person’s blood and energy, it would abandon the body and find another container for parasitism, until it finally collected all of the other parts of its corpse.

As soon as the arm had possessed a person, they would die immediately. But, before all of the flesh had been eaten, they would still be able to walk around, under its control, as if the person was still alive. After it was attracted, the first container that it found was Mo ZiYuan. The second

one was Mo ZiYuan's father. When Madame Mo told her husband to go away, he acted out of the norm and pushed her. Wei WuXian originally thought that it was because he was grieving his son's death and also tired of his wife's arrogance. Now that he thought about it again, it wasn't what a father who had just lost his son should look like. It wasn't the indifference from feeling hopeless. It was a deadly tranquility—the tranquility coming from an already-deceased person.

The third container was A-Tong, and the fourth one was Madame Mo. During the chaos from when the lights suddenly went out, the ghost hand had transferred onto her body. When Madame Mo died, the last cut on Wei WuXian's wrists also disappeared.

The boys from the Lan Clan saw that, although talismans didn't work, clothing did, and all took off their coats to cover the left hand. The layers of clothing looked like a white cocoon. After a second, the ball of white clothes ignited with a " , creating a green, abnormal inferno. Although it would take care of the moment, after a while, when the uniforms were completely burnt, the hand would emerge from within the ashes. While nobody was looking, Wei WuXian ran towards the West Courtyard.

The ten-or-so walking corpses that were subdued by the boys stood silently in the courtyard, by the incantations drawn on the ground. Wei WuXian kicked one of the symbols, destroying the entire formation. He clapped twice. Suddenly, with a jolt, the whites of the walking corpses' eyes all turned upward, as if they were woken up by a bolt of thunder.

Wei WuXian spoke, "Wake up. It's time to work!"

He usually didn't need complex incantations to control these corpse puppets—a straightforward command would do as well. The walking corpses in front of him moved a few quivering steps. But, as they approached Wei WuXian, their legs grew weak and they collapsed onto the ground, as if they were real humans.

Wei WuXian found it both funny and annoying. He clapped his hands again, this time lighter. However, these walking corpses were probably born in Mo Village and died here as well, not having experienced life fully. They instinctively followed the summoner's commands, but were also horrified at the summoner, lying on the ground and afraid to get up.

The crueler the being was, the better Wei WuXian could control it. These walking corpses hadn't been trained by him and couldn't withstand direct manipulations from him. He didn't have any materials on him, which meant that he couldn't immediately make tools to ease the walking corpses. He couldn't even muddle and assemble bits and pieces. The soaring green flames in the East Courtyard gradually grew dimmer. Suddenly, Wei WuXian found a solution.

Why would he need to come outside and find a dead person with strong resentment and a cruel personality?

There were not only one, but multiple corpses in the East Hall!

He ran back to the East Courtyard. As Lan SiZhui's first solution failed, he found a second one. The disciples pulled out their swords and stuck them into the ground, making a sword fence. The ghost hand crashed into the fence, and they spent all their energy compressing their hilts so that it didn't break out, paying no attention to who was entering and leaving.

Wei WuXian strode into the East Hall and grabbed Madame Mo and Mo ZiYuan's corpses, one on each hand, and spoke in a low voice, "Wake up!"

In a split second, Madame Mo and Mo ZiYuan's eye whites turned up, and started making the shrill and powerful shrieks that ferocious ghosts made after they came back to life.

Amidst the shrieks, another corpse trembled and crawled up, making the lowest and faintest shriek. It was Madame Mo's husband.

The shrieks were loud enough and the resentment was strong enough. Wei WuXian smiled, feeling quite satisfied, "Do you recognize the hand outside?"

He commanded, "Tear it apart."

The three members of the Mo family whipped out like three clouds of black wind.

The left arm fractured one of the swords, and was about to break out, when three cruel corpses without left arms came at it.

Aside from being unable to defy Wei WuXian's command, the family also loathed the creature that killed them, and let out their anger on the ghost hand. The main attacker was undoubtedly Madame Mo. Since female corpses were often especially fierce after they were modified, her hair was loose and her eyes were bloodshot. With nails that multiplied in length, foam gathering at the corners of her mouth, and shrieks that were enough to uplift the ceiling, she looked extremely insane. Behind her followed Mo ZiYuan, who cooperated with her and used both his teeth and his hands. His father was at the end, covering for the gaps between the attacks of the other two corpses. The struggling boys were stricken dumb with amazement.

They had only seen these battles between multiple fierce corpses in books and hearsay, and they all gaped as they saw the gore-splattered scene for the first time, unable to avert their gazes. They all thought that it was…absolutely thrilling!

The three corpses and the hand were in the middle of a tough battle, when Mo ZiYuan abruptly moved out of the way. His abdomen area was attacked by the hand, causing a few chunks of his intestines to spill out. As Madame Mo saw this, she screamed incessantly and shielded her son behind herself. Her attacks were more violent, the strength of her fingers almost comparable to that of steel and iron weapons. But,Wei WuXian knew that she was gradually being overpowered.

Even three cruel corpses who recently died couldn't subdue this single arm!

Wei WuXian was watching the battle attentively. His tongue was slightly curled, suppressing a sharp whistle inside of his lips, preparing it to be let out. The whistle would be able to evoke even more hostility in the cruel corpses, which might turn the tables. Then, however, it would be difficult to ensure that nobody knew that it was his doing. In the blink of an eye, the hand moved like lightning, ruthlessly and precisely breaking Madame Mo's neck.

Watching as the Mo family grew closer to defeat, Wei WuXian prepared to blow the whistle that he suppressed under his tongue. At the same time, the echoes of two strums on a stringed instrument came from far away.

The sound seemed to have been played by a human. The timbre was ethereal and clear, carrying . The creatures battling in the courtyard all stiffened as they heard the sound.

Instantaneously, the boys from the GusuLan Sect started beaming, as if they were born again. Lan SiZhui wiped the blood off his face and raised his head, happily exclaiming, " !
" !"

As soon as he heard the two faraway strums of the # , Wei WuXian turned around and began to leave.

The sound of another strum came. This time, the pitch was higher, piercing through the sky with a few degrees of bitterness. The three cruel corpses backed off and covered one ear with their right hands. However, it was impossible to block out the $ % of the GusuLan Sect by means such as this. They had just retreated a few steps, and slight bursting sounds came from within their skulls.

Since the arm had just endured a tough fight, after hearing the sound of the strings again, it instantly fell onto the ground. Although the fingers were still flinching, the arm was unable to move.

After a short moment of silence, the boys couldn't help but to cheer loudly, celebrating the joy of surviving the incident. They had struggled through the exhilarating night, and their sect's reinforcement had finally came. Even if they'd be punished because of reasons such as "being discourteous and making noise that was harmful to the sect's reputation," they didn't care.

After waving towards the moon, Lan SiZhui suddenly realized that someone had disappeared. He tugged Lan JingYi, "Where is he?"

Lan JingYi was absorbed in the act of rejoicing, "Who? Which one?"

Lan SiZhui replied, "Young Master Mo."

Lan JingYi said, "Hmm? Why are you looking for that lunatic? Who knows where he ran off to. He's probably frightened by my threats to hit him."

"..." Lan SiZhui knew that Lan JingYi had always been careless and straightforward, not thinking twice about anything or suspecting anyone. He thought, " , - '.

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Mo Village was still asleep, but it was difficult to tell whether it was a real slumber or a faked one. Although the corpse fight was a mass of blood and gore, the villagers didn't wake up during the early morning to watch. After all, even bystanders needed to choose which events to show up at. One that involved lots of screaming was definitely not the safest type.

Wei WuXian eliminated all evidence of the sacrificial formation in Mo XuanYu's room as fast as he could, and ran out the door.

Unfortunately, the person who came happened to be from the Lan Clan, but even more unfortunately, he happened to be Lan WangJi!

This was one of the people who had fought with him before, so he should retreat quickly. He was in a hurry to find a mount, as he passed a courtyard and saw a big millstone inside. A donkey was tied to the handle, chewing on its mouth. When it saw him run over rashly, it seemed like it was surprised, and eyed him sideways as if it was a real person. Wei WuXian made eye contact with him for one second, and was immediately touched by the miniscule amount of contempt in its eyes.

He tried to grab onto the rope and pull it out, but the donkey complained by making a few loud noises. Therefore, Wei WuXian had to use both his words and his strength to deceive it and get it onto the road. As dawn came over the horizon, they went off onto the main path.

Translator's Notes

: This does not mean to seal a piece of paper. It means to “apply a sort of power to an object/person so that they cannot use one or more of their usual powers” (“Baidu Baike”).

% : Here, the author makes reference to a poem by Liu ChangQing. The translation of this phrase used chinesepoems.blogspot.ca as a reference.

! " : HanGuang-Jun is the seme’s “alternative name” or “hao”. An alternative name is usually a title given to a person by themselves or others. In this case, the “-Jun” suffix at the end directly translates to “gentleman” or “a man of noble character”. Interesting enough, the “-kun” suffix in Japanese derived from this, although the two are used differently.

& : Here, the zither refers to the Chinese zither.

$ % : The literal meaning is “sounds that can overcome obstacles”. It is often used while attacking.

Chapter 6: Arrogance—Part One

Only a few days passed, and Wei WuXian realized that he might have made a wrong choice.

The donkey that he conveniently picked up was too hard to please.

Although it was only a donkey, it would exclusively eat fresh, young grass with dewdrops still hanging off them. If the tip of the grass had a streak of yellow, it wouldn’t eat it. Passing a farm, Wei WuXian stole some wheat straws to feed it, but after chewing them, it spit it out with a , even louder than that of its human counterparts. If it didn’t eat high-quality food, it wouldn’t

budge, and it'd lose its temper and kick around. For multiple times, Wei WuXian was almost kicked by it. Aside from that, it's brays also sounded extremely horrible to the ear.

It was useless, no matter as a mount or a pet!

Wei WuXian couldn't help but to think of his sword. The sword was probably collected by the leader of a prominent clan and would have hanged on a wall as a trophy that they could show other people.

After pushing and pulling along for a few blocks, the road reached a vast farmland of some village. Under the scorching sun, there was a large pagoda tree and thick, green grass underneath it. Beside the tree, there was an old well, with a barrel and a dipper on the side, placed there by the farmers for any passersby to quench their thirst. The donkey ran over there and nothing could make it leave. Wei WuXian hopped down and slapped its honoured buttocks, "You're definitely destined for wealth, even harder to please than me."

The donkey spat at him.

While they fooled around aimlessly, a group of people approached from within the fields.

The people carried handmade bamboo baskets, and wore cotton clothes and straw sandals, emitting the rustic airs of rural villagers. In the group, there was a young girl with a round face that could be considered delicate. Possibly because of walking for too long under the sun, they also wanted to come over to rest by the shade and have some water. However, seeing that there was a wild donkey tied to the tree and a lunatic with heavy makeup and dishevelled hair, they were reluctant to go over.

Wei WuXian had always thought of himself as one who was courteous towards women, so he moved over, emptying some space, and went to struggle with the donkey. After realizing that he was harmless, the people were finally at ease to come over. All of them were drenched in sweat and had ruddy cheeks; some were fanning themselves and some fetching water. The girl sat by the well and smiled at Wei WuXian, as if she knew that he purposely moved away.

One of the people held a compass in his hand. He looked into the distance, and then lowered his head questioningly, "We're already at the foot of Dafan Mountain, so why hasn't the pointer started moving yet?"

The designs and pointer on the compass looked strange, indicating that it wasn't a normal compass. It wasn't one that showed the North, South, East, and West, but one that showed the directions malicious creatures, also known as a " $' ." Wei WuXian realized that

this was probably a poor cultivation clan from the countryside. Aside from highbrow, affluent clans, there were also smaller clans like this, who closed their doors and cultivated on their own. Wei WuXian thought that they might have left their village to either find a clan whom they were distant relatives to, or to go night-hunting.

The middle-aged man leading the group called for people to take a drink and replied, "Your compass might be broken; I'll get you a new one later. Dafan Mountain is less than ten miles ahead of us, which means that we cannot rest for too long. We have struggled through the whole journey, and if we relax now and fall behind, with other people beating us to it, it wouldn't have been worth it."

As expected, it was a night-hunt. A lot of refined cultivation clans called travelling to places and exorcising evil beings "hunting." Because of how these creatures often appear at night, it was also called "night-hunting." There were countless cultivation clans, but only a few were distinguished. Without the contributions from its ancestors, if an average clan wanted to become famous and receive respect in the cultivation world, it would have to show its abilities. Only if a clan captured a fierce monster or a terrorizing being, could it have then been treated seriously.

This was originally Wei WuXian's specialty area. However, during the days of travelling, he destroyed a few graves, but only found small ghosts. He happened to need a ghost soldier to do evil for him, and decided to go to ( ) to try his luck. If he found a good one, he'd capture it and put it to use.

After the group of people finished resting, they prepared to move on. Before they left, the round-faced girl took a small, partly-ripened apple out of her basket and handed it to him, "Here you go."

Wei WuXian extended his hand to receive it, grinning broadly, but the donkey also opened its mouth and bit at it. Wei WuXian quickly took the apple away. Seeing that the donkey craved the apple so much, he thought of a good idea. He gathered a long stick and a fishing thread, hanged the apple on one end, and dangled it in front of the donkey. The donkey smelled the apple's refreshing scent from in front of him and wanted to eat it, chasing the apple which was always a centimeter away from him. Its speed was faster than the best horses Wei WuXian had ever seen, leaving only dust behind it.

Without stopping, Wei WuXian arrived at Dafan Shan before dark. Upon arriving at the foot of the mountain, he finally realized that the "fan" wasn't the one he thought it was. It got its name because, looking from far away, the mountain looked like a kind, chubby buddha. There was a small town below the mountain, named Buddha's Feet.

The number of cultivators who gathered here were far more than what he had expected. Everything was a jumble, with people from different sects and clans walking down the streets, all in uniforms of different colors, almost blinding to the eye. For some reason, all of them wore distressed expressions. Nobody bothered to laugh at him even though they saw his strange appearance.

In the center of the long street, a group of cultivators gathered, talking in serious tones. It seemed as if their opinions differed greatly. Even from afar, Wei WuXian could hear them talking. In the beginning, everything was fine, but they suddenly became agitated.

"... I think that there are no soul-consuming beasts or spirits in the area at all. It's clear that none of the Compasses of Evil showed anything."

"If there isn't, then how did the seven people lose their souls? They couldn't have all attained the same disease, could they? I, for one, haven't heard of this disease at all!"

"Even if the Compass of Evil is not showing anything, does it mean that there's nothing in the area? It can only point out an approximate direction, without any specifics, so it shouldn't be fully trusted. Maybe there's something here that can interfere with the pointer's direction."

"Do you remember who created the Compass of Evil? I've never heard of anything that can interfere with its pointer's direction."

"What do you mean? Are you implying anything with that tone of yours? Of course, I know that * + created the Compass of Evil. But, it's not as if his creations are flawless. Aren't we allowed the option of doubt, at least?"

"I never said that you can't doubt it, much less his creations are flawless, so why accuse me?"

And so, their argument had turned to another direction. Wei WuXian passed them on his donkey, giggling and laughing. He didn't expect that, after so many years had passed, he was still alive in the cultivators' conversations. This was the so-called "much ado about Wei." If there was ever a poll to find out whose popularity was the most lasting in the cultivation world, the winner would be no other than Wei WuXian.

To be honest, the cultivator wasn't wrong. The Compasses of Evil in use today was the first version that he made, and were, indeed, not specific enough. He was in the middle of making improvements when his "den" was destroyed, so he had to put everyone through the inconvenience of using the imprecise version one.

Anyways, creatures that ate blood and flesh were usually low in level, such as walking corpses. Only the more refined high-level monsters or ghosts were capable of eating and digesting souls. This one ate seven at once—no wonder so many clans had gathered here. Since the prey was by no means a trivial matter, it was inevitable for the Compasses of Evil to make mistakes.

Wei WuXian reined in the rope and hopped off the donkey's back, holding the apple, which had been ahead of it for the whole journey, in front of its mouth, "One bite. One bite only… Hmph, are you trying to eat my whole hand with that bite of yours?"

He ate a few bites from the other side of the apple, and stuffed it back into the donkey's mouth, pondering upon how he came down to the point of sharing an apple with a donkey, when, suddenly, someone bumped into his back. He turned around to see a girl. Although she bumped into him, she didn't acknowledge him at all. Her eyes were dull and she had a smile on her face, staring into the distance without blinking.

Wei WuXian followed her gaze, and saw the dense mountaintop of Dafan Mountain.

All of a sudden, the girl started dancing in front of him without saying anything.

The dance was wild, with her arms flinging about savagely. Wei WuXian was watching the performance with keen pleasure when a woman ran over, lifting her dress slightly. She embraced the girl and cried, "A-Yan, let's go back, let's go back!"

A-Yan brushed her off with force, her smile still unfaded, creating a terrifying sort of affection, and continued to dance. The woman had to chase her down the street, sobbing while running. A street vendor on the side spoke, "How awful. A-Yan from Blacksmith Zheng's family has escaped again."

"It must be horrible for her mom. A-Yan, A-Yan's husband, and her husband… All of them were…"

Wei WuXian wandered around, piecing together the strange event that happened here from picking up on different people's conversations.

On Dafan Mountain, there was a burial ground. Most of the ancestors of the townspeople from Buddha's Feet were buried here and, sometimes, unidentifiable corpses would also receive a spot and a wooden plaque here. A few months ago, in a dark and stormy night, the wind and the rain caused a piece of land on Dafan Mountain to slide and collapse, which happened to be the burial ground. Many older graves were destroyed, and a few coffins were exposed to the air and struck by lightning, causing both the corpses and the coffins to be charred black.

The townspeople of Buddha's Feet were extremely uneasy. After a few rounds of prayers, they rebuilt the burial ground again, assuming that everything would be just fine. However, ever since then, people in the town started to lose their souls.

The first one was a sluggard. He was a poor wretch, loafing about and doing no work at all. Because he loved to hike on the mountain and catch birds, he happened to be stuck in the mountain during the night of the landslide. He was frightened to death, but, luckily, he was safe. The peculiar thing was that, after a few days, he suddenly married someone. His wedding was quite large, and he said that he wanted to be charitable from now on and settle down.

On the night of the wedding, he was completely drunken, having never woken up ever since he lay on the bed. The bride didn't receive an answer as she called him. Only when she pushed him over did she realize that the groom had dreary eyes and a cold body. Aside from being able to breathe, he was no different from a dead person. After a few days of lying on the bed, not eating or drinking anything, he was finally buried. Unfortunately, the bride had become a widow shortly after she married.

The second one was A-Yan, from Blacksmith Zheng's family. The young girl had just received an engagement when her future husband was killed by a wolf on the second day, while he was hunting in the mountains. After she got the news, she also became like the sluggard. Luckily, after some time, her soul-losing disease was cured on its own. However, after this, she went crazy, cheerfully dancing to other people when she was outside.

The third one was A-Yan's father, Blacksmith Zheng. Until now, this had happened to seven people.

Wei WuXian considered the situation, and figured that it was most likely a soul-consuming spirit, not a soul-consuming beast.

Although only one word was different between the two, they were completely different beings. A spirit was a ghost, while a beast was a monster. To him, it was likely that the landslide had destroyed an ancient tomb, and, with lightning splitting the coffin open, a resting spirit had been let out. If he looked at the type of coffin and the presence of any seals on it, he could figure out whether or not this was the case. However, the townsfolk of Buddha's Feet had already buried the charred coffins somewhere else and laid the corpses to rest again, which meant that there wouldn't be a great deal of evidence left.

To go up the mountain, one had to hike up trail that started in the town. Wei WuXian sat on his donkey and rode up the hill slowly. After a while, a few people walked down with ominous expressions on their faces.

Some of them had scars on their faces, and they were talking all at once. With the darkening sky, they all jumped as they saw a person who looked like a hanged ghost approaching them. After cursing, they walked around him quickly. Wei WuXian turned his head around and thought, " " He didn't think too much about it and slapped the donkey's buttocks, making it jog faster up the mountain.

Coincidentally, he missed the group's whining, which happened shortly afterward.

"I haven't seen anyone like this!"

"Would the leader of a big clan like that need to fight over a soul-consuming spirit with us? He probably killed tons of them when he was young."

"What can we do? He's a sect leader. No matter which clan you choose to offend, you shouldn't offend the Jiang clan, and no matter which person you choose to offend, you shouldn't offend Jiang Cheng. Let's just pack up, leave, and feel sorry for ourselves!"

Translator's Notes

$' : The literal translation is "Wind-evil Compass".

( ) : The "fan" in "Dafan Mountain" means "relating to Buddhism," but it also sounds similar to "rice," so Wei WuXian mistakenly thought that it means "big rice mountain."

* + : This is Wei WuXian's birth name. In Ancient China, people usually don't call others by their birth names, unless they were of the same age and close acquaintances with each other. It was considered disrespectful to even mention an elder's birth name. The common name, or the "zi," was another name given to the person by their parents, which other people can freely mention. In this case, by referring to Wei WuXian by his birth name, the speaker is showing his disregard for him.

Chapter 7 Arrogance—Part Two

If it was darker, then one would need a torch to move freely about in the mountain's forest. Wei WuXian walked for a while, but he didn't meet many cultivators. He was quite surprised,

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Suddenly, cries for help came from in front of him.

"Is anyone there?"

"Help us!"

Both male and female voices could be heard, and all sounded panicked, probably not faked. Cries for help from desolate mountains were usually the works of evil creatures, to lure ignorant people into traps. Yet, Wei WuXian was extremely happy.

The eviler the creature was, the better it was for him!

He directed the donkey toward the direction of the voices, but couldn't find anything around him. As he looked upward, instead of spirits or monsters, it was the rural clan that he met by the field earlier on, hung on the trees by a huge, golden web.

The middle-aged man was originally patrolling and scouting in the forest with a few others. However, rather than meeting the prey that they had hoped for, they stepped into a net trap, probably set up by some wealthy clan, which was why they were hanging on the trees, complaining and calling for help. After seeing that someone approached, they immediately brightened up, but the hope faded as they saw that it was a lunatic who came. Although the threads of the deity-binding net were thin, the material was fine in quality, making them difficult to break. No matter human, god, demon, spirit, or monster, it would take a long while for the intruder to struggle out since it could only be broken by a superior magical tool. The lunatic probably didn't even know what it was, much less how to get them out of it.

He was about to call others to come help him when the crisp sounds of parting branches and stepping on leaves approached. A boy wearing a light-colored robe emerged from within the dark forest.

The boy had a vermillion mark in between his eyebrows, his features delicate yet sharp. He was quite young, around the same age as Lan SiZhui—still in his adolescence. He carried a bamboo

canister of feathered arrows and a luminous sword on his back, holding a longbow in his hand. The embroidery on his clothes was extremely delicate, forming a magnificent white peony in front of his chest. The golden threads glistened against the dark nighttime shades surrounding him.

Wei WuXian silently exclaimed, “How wealthy!”

This must have been a young master studying in the LanlingJin Sect, since the sect was the only one with a white peony as the clan pattern, using the king of all flowers to suggest that they were the king of all cultivators. The ' implied the meaning of “opening the doors toward wisdom and aspiration; illuminating the world with the vermillion light.”

The young master already had an arrow on his bow and was preparing to shoot it, when he realized that the deity-binding nets only caught humans. After an initial moment of disappointment, he quickly became annoyed, “I find you idiots every single time. There are more than four hundred deity-binding nets in the mountain, but you guys have already broken ten or so, and I haven’t even seen the prey yet!”

Wei WuXian thought, again, “How wealthy!”

A single deity-binding net was already expensive, yet he had set up four hundred all at once. A smaller clan would’ve become bankrupt after buying so many, but then, of course, this was the LanlingJin Sect. However, wasting deity-binding webs like this and not caring about what they caught shouldn’t be considered night-hunting at all. In fact, it was almost as if they were chasing people away, not allowing others the chance of contributing to the process. It seemed that the cultivators who retreated earlier didn’t do it because the prey was difficult, but rather because this sect was one that shouldn’t be angered.

After a few days of traveling slowly and listening to the intriguing conversations at Buddha’s Feet, Wei WuXian gathered a lot of information about the changes to the cultivation world. As the final winner of the hundred-year-long cultivational disruption, the LanlingJin Sect was the head of all clans and sects—its leader was even referred to as the “commander” of all cultivators. Even before this, the Jin Clan was arrogant, admirers of extravagant splendor. After the years of being at the top and while strengthening the sect, it had trained all of its disciples to do whatever they wanted to. Even a slightly weaker clan would have to submit to their humiliation, much less a small, rural clan such as this one. This was why, although the people trapped in the nets were red with fury, because of the mean words of the boy, they could not talk back. The middle-aged man spoke with tolerance, “Please, +) , do us a small favor and let us down.”

The boy was restless with the anxiety of his prey still not arriving, and it was convenient for him to direct his anger toward the country bumpkins. He crossed his arms, “You guys should just stay here, in case you mess around and get in my way again! I’ll let you down after I catch the spirit-consuming beast, that is, if I still remember you.”

If they really stayed on the trees for the whole night and happened to bump into the creature that haunted Dafan Mountain, being unable to move, all they could do would be to wait for their souls to be sucked dry. The round-faced girl who gave an apple to Wei WuXian felt scared and started crying. Wei WuXian was originally cross-legged on the donkey, but as it heard the sob, his long ears quivered, and it suddenly leapt forward.

Following the leap came a long bray. If not for how horrible the bray sounded, its unstoppable vigour could almost pass for a purebred horse. Unprepared for this, Wei WuXian was thrown off of its back, almost injuring his head as he fell. The donkey ran head-first toward the boy as if it believed that it could knock him off his feet with its head. The boy’s arrow was still poised on the bow, conveniently drawing the bow toward its direction. Wei WuXian didn’t want to find a new mount so soon, so he quickly yanked on its reins. The boy took a look at him, a look of shock to suddenly appear on his face. After a second, the shock turned into disdain. His mouth twitched, “So, it’s you.”

The tone was made of twenty percent surprise and eighty percent disgust, making Wei WuXian blink. The boy spoke again, “Did you lose your marbles after you were thrown back to your village? How could they let you outside when you looked as freaky as this?”

Did he really just hear something of such significance?

, Wei WuXian suddenly realized, !

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Jin GuangShan was the last leader of the LanlingJin Sect, having already passed away. On the topic of this man, one sentence could not tell the whole story. He had a fierce wife from a prominent family and, in fact, he was known for being scared of her. However, even if he was scared, it never stopped him from going to other women. No matter how fierce Madame Jin was, it was impossible for her to follow him twenty-four hours a day. Therefore, from ladies of distinguished statuses to prostitutes in rural areas, if he could get his hands on one, he wouldn’t miss the chance. And, although he enjoyed casual relationships and flirted everywhere, having an uncountable amount of illegitimate children, it was extremely easy for him to get bored. After he grew tired a woman, he would forget about her completely, without any responsibility or whatsoever. Among all of his illegitimate children, there was only one who proved to be exceptionally talented and ended up being taken back—the current leader of the LanlingJin Sect,

Jin GuangYao. Moreover, Jin GuangShan didn't die honourably either. He believed that he was old but vigorous, and wanted to challenge himself, fooling around with a group of women. However, unfortunately, he failed and passed away during the act. This was too humiliating, and so, the LanlingJin Sect told the public that the old leader died from overworking himself. All of the other clans decided to keep silent about the matter and pretended that they didn't know anything. Anyways, those were the real reasons behind his "fame."

During the siege in Luanzang Hill, aside from Jiang Cheng, Jin GuangShan was the second-greatest contributor. And now, Wei WuXian had taken over the body of his own illegitimate son. He really didn't know if they were even with each other.

Seeing that he was spacing out, the boy grew even more annoyed, "Get out of here! It's disgusting just looking at you, you damn gay!"

In terms of his generation, it was highly possible for Mo XuanYu to be an elder to the boy, maybe an uncle. After being humiliated by a junior like this, Wei WuXian thought that even if not for his own sake, he needed to return the humiliation for Mo XuanYu's body, "What an attitude! I suppose that you didn't have a mother to teach you?"

Hearing his words, two raging flames sparked in the boy's eyes. He unsheathed the sword on his back and threatened, "What… Did you say?"

The blade of the sword shone a golden light. It was a rare sword of high quality—most clans probably couldn't get a small piece of it even if they spent their whole lives saving for it. Wei WuXian examined it attentively, somehow thinking that the sword seemed familiar to him. Then again, he had seen his share of gold, top-notch swords. He didn't think too much about it and began to spin a tiny cloth bag that he held in his hand.

It was a makeshift "spirit-locking bag" that he had created a few days ago, using the scraps and pieces of things. As the boy wielded the sword and came toward him, he fished a piece of human-shaped paper out of the spirit-locking bag. He shifted to the side, avoiding the attack, and slapped the paper onto his opponent's back.

The boy's movements were already fast, but Wei WuXian had done a lot of "tripping someone while slapping a talisman onto their back", which meant that he was faster. The boy suddenly felt his torso become numb, his back weakening, and he unwillingly collapsed onto the ground, with his sword also falling to the side with a . He couldn't get up no matter how hard he tried, as if a mountain was on top of him. On his back, there was a ghost who had died from gluttony, crushing him to the point that he couldn't even breathe. Although the ghost was weak, it was completely capable of dealing with brats like this one. Wei WuXian picked up his sword,

weighed it in his hands, and swung toward the direction of the deity-binding net, splitting it in half.

The family fell to the ground in an awkward way, but they sprinted off without saying anything. The round-faced girl seemed as if she wanted to thank him, but she was pulled away by an elder, who was scared that Young Master Jin would hate them even more. The boy on the ground was fuming, “You damn gay! Good for you, taking this sort of wrong path because you didn’t have enough spiritual powers to do anything! Watch out for your life! Do you know who came today? Today, I…”

Although the cultivation method that he used in the past was often criticized and, in the long term, it harmed the cultivator’s health, it could be mastered quickly. It was also especially attractive because there were no limitations as to the cultivator’s spiritual powers or talent, making it so that there were always people who secretly practiced it to find a shortcut. The boy presumed that, after being chased from the LanlingJin Sect, Mo XuanYu had chosen the dishonourable path, which was a reasonable conclusion to draw, saving Wei WuXian from a lot of unnecessary trouble.

The boy pushed on the ground, but couldn’t get up even after a few tries. His face was scarlet and he gritted his teeth, “If you don’t stop, I’m gonna tell my uncle, and you’re gonna wait for your death!”

Wei WuXian wondered, “Why is it your uncle, not your dad? Who’s your uncle, again?”

A voice suddenly came from behind him, a mixture of being bitter and cold.

“I am his uncle. Do you have any last words?”

Hearing the voice, all of the blood from Wei WuXian’s body travelled to his head and drained away a moment later. The good thing was that his face was already a pile of white. A shade whiter wouldn’t make too much of a difference.

A violet-clothed youth approached in confident steps, his , - robe flowing smoothly and his hand pressing on the hilt of his sword. A silver bell hung by his waist, although it made no sound as he walked.

The young man had thin brows and almond eyes. His features were handsome in a sharp way, and his eyes held a composed vigour, with a slight intention of attack, appearing to be two bolts of lightning as he stared. He stood ten steps away from Wei WuXian, his expression resembling

a honed arrow on the bow, ready to be released at any moment. Even his posture emitted an air of arrogance and overconfidence.

He frowned, “Jin Ling, why did you linger for so long? Do you really need me to come and pick you up? Look at what a terrible situation you’re in right now, and get up!”

After the initial numbing of his head, Wei WuXian quickly realized what was going on. He curled a finger inside his sleeve and made the piece of paper retreat. Jin Ling felt his back lighten and immediately rolled up, grabbing his sword in the process. He shifted near Jiang Cheng and pointed at Wei WuXian accusingly, “I’m gonna break your legs!”

With the pair of uncle and nephew standing beside each other, it was clear that they shared a close resemblance, probably able to pass for brothers. Jiang Cheng moved his finger, and the paper doll swiftly flew out of Wei WuXian’s hand and into his own. After taking one look at it, hostility came over his face. He pressured his fingers, and the paper was ignited, burning to dust with the screams of dark spirits.

Jiang Cheng spoke grimly, “Break his legs? Haven’t I told you? If you see this sort of evil and crooked practice, kill the cultivator and feed him to your dogs!”

Wei WuXian couldn’t even attempt to grab his donkey, backing away at rapid speed. He thought that, after so many years, no matter how much hatred Jiang Cheng had held for him, it would have disappeared long ago. He didn’t expect that not only did it not disappear, it became richer, as if it was a , of aged alcohol. At the present time, his hatred had grown to affect even people who cultivated like him!

With someone backing him up, Jin Ling’s attacks became more aggressive. Wei WuXian slid two fingers into the spirit-locking bag, about to take something out, when suddenly, the blue glare of a sword slashed out like lightning. It collided with Jin Ling’s sword, breaking the powerful sword’s golden rays in an instant.

It wasn’t because of the quality of the swords, but rather the great disparity in the strengths of the persons using the swords. Wei WuXian had originally calculated the timing, but his movements were suddenly interrupted by the sword’s glare, causing him to trip. He fell toward the ground, right on top of a pair of snow-white boots. After pausing for a moment, he slowly lifted his head.

What first came into his sight was a long, slender blade, crystalline and translucent, as if it was made of ice.

In the cultivation world, this sword was one of the most famous ones. Wei WuXian had experienced its powers countless times, including both battles fought beside it and against it. The hilt of the sword was forged from pure silver that had been refined with secret techniques. The blade of the sword was extremely thin, almost transparent, sending forth the cold breaths of ice and snow. However, at the same time, it could cut through iron like cutting through mud. This was why, although the sword looked light, as if it could fly away any instant, it was actually quite heavy, unable to be wielded by the average person.

Its name was “ .”

The blade turned, and the of the sword being inserted back into the scabbard sounded from above Wei WuXian. At the same time, Jiang Cheng’s voice came from afar, “And I was wondering who it was. So, it is you, Second Young Master Lan.”

The pair of white boots passed around Wei WuXian and calmly walked three steps forward. Wei WuXian raised his head and got up. As he walked past the former, slightly brushing their shoulders, he made eye contact with him for a short moment, pretending that it was unintentional.

He had an aura of smooth moonlight. The seven-stringed zither that he carried on his back was narrower than most. Its body was black, made using wood of soft color.

The man wore a forehead ribbon with cloud patterns. His skin was fair, features both refined and elegant, as if he was a piece of polished jade. The color of his eyes was especially light, like they were made of colored glass, causing his gaze to be overly distant. His expression held the traces of frost and snow, stern to the degree of being stiff, unwavering even as he saw Wei WuXian’s ridiculous face.

There wasn’t a single spec of dust or wrinkled spot on him, from his head to his feet. It was impossible to find any fault with his appearance. Even so, two capitalized words jumped into Wei WuXian’s mind.

$

Mourning clothes, indeed. Although all of the clans in the cultivation world used extravagant words to describe the GusuLan Sect’s uniform as the best-looking uniform and Lan WangJi as an incomparable beauty who only appeared once in a blue moon, nothing could help the bitter facial expression that made him look as though his wife had passed away.

In an unlucky year, enemies would often find their paths to cross; good news always traveled alone, but one disaster always followed the next… Thus, the situation right now.

Lan WangJi was silent, staring straight ahead, standing motionlessly in front of Jiang Cheng. Jiang Cheng was already exceptionally handsome, but as they stood face to face with each other, he still seemed a few degrees inferior. He raised one brow and spoke, "HanGuang-Jun, you sure live up to your reputation of 'being wherever the chaos is'. So, you had time to come to this remote area today?"

Powerful cultivators from prominent clans usually didn't care to pay attention to lower level preys. However, Lan WangJi was an exception. He never cared for the prey of a night-hunt, and wouldn't refuse to go just because the creature was not threatening enough to increase his fame. If anyone wanted help, he would be there. He had been like this ever since he was young. "Being wherever the chaos is" was the comment that the public gave him for his night-hunts and, also, praise for his moral character. Right now, Jiang Cheng really didn't seem too polite as he said the words in such a tone. Even the juniors who came following Lan WangJi didn't seem comfortable hearing it. Lan JingYi spoke straightforwardly, "Isn't Sect Leader Jiang here as well?"

Jiang Cheng replied grimly, "3 , do you really think that you should butt in when your seniors are conversing? The GusuLan Sect has always been known for its respectful conduct. Is this really how it teaches its disciples?"

Lan WangJi seemed as if he didn't want to engage in conversation, throwing Lan SiZhui a look. The latter understood and told the juniors to speak among themselves. Afterward, he spoke to Jin Ling, "Young Master Jin, night-hunts have always been fair competitions amongst the different clans and sects. However, to set up nets all over Dafan Mountain is clearly hindering the cultivators, causing them to fall into the traps. Is this or is this not against the rules of night-hunting?"

Jin Ling's grim expression was exactly the same as his uncle's, "What can I do? It was their own fault for stepping into the traps. I'll solve everything after I finish capturing the prey."

Lan WangJi frowned. Jin Ling was about to speak again, but he suddenly realized that, shockingly, he could neither open his mouth nor make any sounds. Seeing that Jin Ling's upper and lower lips became inseparable as if they were glued together, anger appeared on Jiang Cheng's face. The sloppy manners that he upheld before this were all gotten rid of, "You, with the Lan surname! What do you mean by this? It's not your turn to discipline Jin Ling yet, so release the spell, now!"

The silence spell was used by the Lan Sect to reprimand its disciples. Wei WuXian had suffered a ton from this little trick. Although it wasn't anything too complicated or obscure, only people of the Lan Clan could release the spell. If one wanted to forcibly speak, it would result in either their lips being ripped bloody or a hoarse throat for a couple of days. The only solution was to stay silent and reflect upon the wrongdoings until the time limit of the punishment was over. Lan SiZhui spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang, there is no need for anger. As long as he does not break the spell forcefully, it would release on its own, after thirty minutes."

Before Jiang Cheng opened his mouth to speak, a purple-clothed man in the Jiang Sect's uniform ran toward them from within the forest. He shouted, "Sect Leader!" However, after seeing Lan WangJi's presence, he hesitated. Jiang Cheng spoke satirically, "Talk. Is there more bad news?"

The man spoke in a low voice, "Not long ago, a blue sword flew over and destroyed the deity-binding nets that you had set up."

Jiang Cheng glanced at Lan WangJi harshly, his displease plastered all over his face, "How many were broken?"

The man replied carefully, "... All of them…"

3 $

Jiang Cheng seethed with anger.

He didn't expect the journey to be this unlucky. Originally, he came to help Jin Ling out. Jin Ling would be turning fifteen this year, the age of which he should already be making his debut and starting to compete with the juniors of other clans. Jiang Cheng considered the decision carefully before choosing Dafan Mountain as the location of the hunt. He also set up nets everywhere and threatened the cultivators of other clans, showing them the consequences so that they would retreat, in order to let Jin Ling take the top prize without anyone fighting against him. Although four hundred deity-binding nets were a whopping price, it wasn't too much for the YunmengJiang Sect. Nonetheless, losing the nets were a small matter, but losing face was not. With Lan WangJi's actions, Jiang Cheng felt a whirlpool of anger at the bottom of his heart, rising higher by every second. He narrowed his eyes, his left hand casually stroking the ring on his right hand's index finger.

This was a dangerous sign.

Everyone knew that the ring was a menacing, strong magical weapon. Whenever Clan Leader Jiang started touching it, it meant that he had the intent to kill.

Translator’s Notes

. : In the past, vermillion marks were drawn on children to “pierce through ignorance” in hope of them being good students later on in life, thus what the implied meaning referred to.

+) : Although the man wasn’t the boy’s servant, in Ancient China, one should still refer to the young master of any family as “Young Master”, especially if the family was of higher status than the speaker’s.

" - : This is a type clothing with sleeves that are wider on the shoulder end and becomes quite narrow by the time it reaches the wrist. However, this really doesn’t matter, because most fanart show him dressed in other ways.

" : In Ancient China, alcohol were stored in large jars made of clay.

: The name means “to avoid dust.” However, please do not pronounce it like . The correct pronunciation is ' , with the sounding like the in .

Chapter 8 Arrogance—Part Three

However, after stroking it for a while, Jiang Cheng compelled himself to restrain his hostility.

Although he was displeased, as the leader of a sect, he needed to take more things into consideration, which meant that he couldn't be as impulsive as Jin Ling. After the fall of the QinghеNie Sect, among the Three Great Sects, the LanlingJin Sect and the GusuLan Sect were quite close due to the personal relationship between the two leaders. By leading the YunmengJiang Sect alone, he was already in an isolated situation among the three. HanGuang-Jun, or Lan WangJi, was quite a prestigious cultivator, while his elder brother ZeWu-Jun, or Lan XiChen, was the leader of the GusuLan Sect. The two brothers had always been on good terms with each other. It was best to not openly dispute with Lan WangJi.

Also, Jiang Cheng's sword, " ," had never made actual contact with Lan WangJi's sword, "Bichen," and it was not yet decidable . Although he owned the powerful ring, "& ," a family heirloom of his, Lan WangJi's zither, "* , ", was also known for its abilities. The thing that Jiang Cheng hated the most was to be disadvantageous during a fight. Without complete confidence in his success, he would not consider fighting with Lan WangJi.

Jiang Cheng slowly took away his left hand, ceasing to stroke his ring. It seemed as if Lan WangJi was determined to take part in this matter, so it wouldn't help if he continued to play the antagonist. Jiang Cheng made the decision to, for the time being, owe him a favour, and turned around to see Jin Ling still covering his mouth angrily, "HanGuang-Jun wants to punish you, so just let him do it for this one time. It's not easy for him, either, to discipline juniors from other clans."

His tone was sarcastic, but it wasn't clear who he was mocking. Lan WangJi never fought to win his way with words, and looked as if he didn't hear anything. Jiang Cheng turned again, his words covered with thorns, "Why are you still standing there? Waiting for the prey to come and throw itself onto your sword? If, today, you don't catch the creature hunting Dafan Mountain, don't come to me ever again!"

Jin Ling threw Wei WuXian a tough look, but was too scared to look at Lan WangJi, the person who had silenced him. He put his sword back into its scabbard, saluted the two seniors, and retreated with the bow in his hand. Lan SiZhui spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang, the GusuLan Sect will return the exact number of spirit-binding nets that had been destroyed."

Jiang Cheng sneered, “No need.” He chose the opposite direction and walked down calmly. The man who had came from the forest followed behind him, pulling a long face because he knew that it’d be impossible to escape a lecture when he returned.

After their figures disappeared, Lan JingYi spoke, “How could the Sect Leader Jiang act like this?” Only afterward, did he remember the Lan Clan’s rule of not talking behind others’ backs. He looked meekly at HanGuang-Jun and shut his mouth. Lan SiZhui smiled softly toward Wei WuXian, “Young Master Mo, we meet again.”

As Wei WuXian pulled the corners of his mouth, Lan WangJi spoke again, “Do your tasks.” The command was simplistic and clear, without any fancy vocabulary for decoration.

The juniors finally remembered the reason behind why they came to Dafan Mountain. They gathered their thoughts and respectfully waited for further instructions. After a moment, Lan WangJi spoke again, “Do what you can. Don’t force anything.”

The voice was deep and alluring. If one was too near, the tip of their heart would tremble. The juniors replied mannerly, afraid to linger for too long, and walked into the depths of the forest. Wei WuXian thought that, undeniably, Jiang Cheng and & were extremely different from each other. Even their advice for juniors were the complete opposite. While thinking, he suddenly saw Lan WangJi give an almost unnoticeable nod to him. He was quite surprised.

Ever since a young age, Lan WangJi had been so prim and proper that it was painful to watch. He had always been solemn and stiff, as if he had never been lively before. He couldn’t let a single grain of sand appear in his eyes, which was why he had never approved of Wei WuXian cultivating the dark path. Lan SiZhui had probably informed Lan WangJi of his suspicious behaviour in Mo Village already. Even so, he had nodded in acknowledgement, probably thanking him for helping out the juniors from the Lan Sect. Without thinking, Wei WuXian immediately returned a salute. When he looked up again, Lan WangJi had already disappeared.

After pausing for a second, he turned around to travel down the mountain.

No matter what prey haunted Dafan Mountain, he couldn’t take it. Wei WuXian could fight for it against anyone, except for Jin Ling.

. %

With so many disciples in the Jin Sect, he really didn’t expect that the person he met happened to be Jin Ling. If he knew, he definitely wouldn’t mock Jin Ling for “having no mother to teach him.” If someone else had said the same words to Jin Ling, he would teach them about what it

means to bring misfortune upon oneself with careless talk. Yet, the person who had said so turned out to be himself.

After standing still for a moment, Wei WuXian raised his hand and gave himself a slap on the face.

The slap was both loud and hard, causing his right cheek to sting. Suddenly, shuffling sounds came from a thicket on the side, and Wei WuXian saw a donkey emerge from within. As he dropped his hand, the donkey actually approached on its own, unlike other times. Wei WuXian pulled on its long ears and forced a smile, "You wanted to save the damsel in distress, but asked me to be the hero to the rescue."

The donkey whined, just as a wave of cultivators approached from the bottom of the hill. After the four-hundred-or-so spirit-binding nets were destroyed by Lan WangJi's sword, the hesitant cultivators in Buddha's Feet all rushed up again. Everyone here was probably Jin Ling's opponent. Wei WuXian considered for a moment, about whether or not to make them retreat again with force. But, after thinking about it, he ended up silently walking out of the way, letting them pass.

The disciples from different sects, wearing differently colored uniforms, complained as they walked, "Both the Jin Sect and the Jiang Sect spoil Young Master Jin too much. He's still so young, but he's already this arrogant and rude. If they let him have the LanlingJin Sect, who knows what chaos would happen? I don't think we'd even survive."

Wei WuXian slowed his pace.

A soft-hearted female cultivator sighed, "How can they not spoil him? He lost both his parents at such a young age."

"Shimei, that's not how it works. So what, if both his parents died? There are tons who lost both of their parents. If everyone acted like him, then what would happen?"

"I'm surprised that Wei WuXian was cruel enough to harm her. Jin Ling's mother was Jiang Cheng's elder sister from birth—the shijie who brought him up."

"It really was too bad for Jiang YanLi, bringing up a wolf that bites the owner's hand. Jin ZiXuan had it even worse. Just because he had something to do with Wei WuXian, he ended up like that."

"Why does Wei WuXian have something to do with everyone…"

“Indeed. Have you heard him being close with anyone other than the mad dogs that he raised? His enemies were everywhere, and he did wrong to everyone. Even with HanGuang-Jun, they were like fire and water, hating each other.”

“Speaking of it, today, if it wasn’t for HanGuang-Jun…”

After walking for a while, the gurgling sounds of a running stream came into Wei WuXian’s ears.

He didn’t hear this when he came up. Wei WuXian finally realized that he walked the wrong path down the mountain, and onto another one that forked off.

Holding the reins of the donkey, he stood beside the running water. The moon could be seen high in the sky. With no branches or leaves on the banks of the stream, fragments of white reflected over the surface. In the reflection, Wei WuXian saw a face, ever-changing from the the flow of the water.

He slammed his palm into the water, dissolving the ridiculous features. He lifted his dripping wet palms and wiped away the powder on his face.

A handsome, graceful youth appeared in the reflections of the water. He looked as pure as if he had been cleansed by moonlight, with smooth brows, bright eyes, and lips curving slightly upward. Yet, as he lowered his head to stare at himself, the drops of water hanging from his lashes rolled off, as if they were drops of tears.

It was a young and unfamiliar face, not the YiLing Patriarch who had overturned the world and killed thousands—Wei WuXian.

After taking a few more looks at this face, Wei WuXian wiped his face again and rubbed his eyes. He sat beside the stream with a .

It wasn’t as if he couldn’t withstand the words of attack. After all, back when he made the decision, he fully understood the situations that he had to face. Ever since then, he had reminded himself of the YunmengJiang Sect’s motto—do it even if it was impossible.

However, although he thought that his heart was like a stone, in the end, he was still human, not some emotionless grass or plant.

The donkey seemed as if it knew that he wasn't in a great mood, and for once, it wasn't being loud out of impatience. A moment of silence passed, and it turned around to leave. Wei WuXian sat by the stream, not responding at all. It turned around to look, throwing its hooves onto the ground, but Wei WuXian still paid no attention to it. The donkey had to come back sulkily, biting and tugging on the corner of Wei WuXian's collar.

He could choose to go, and he could choose to not go. Seeing that the donkey had went as far as to use his mouth, Wei WuXian decided to follow him. The donkey took him to a few trees and circled around an area of grass. In the grass, there lay a / , with a ragged golden net hanging above it. It probably fell off as an unlucky cultivator struggled their way out. Wei WuXian picked up the bag and opened it. There were quite a few items in it, such as of medicinal liquor, talismans, miniature demon-reflecting mirrors, and so on.

He fished around for some time and happened to pull out a talisman. Immediately, a ball of fire appeared in his hand.

The burning item was an gloom-burning talisman, which, like its name, used dark energy as fuel. It would burn automatically if it made contact with dark energy. The more energy there was, the stronger the flame was. It lit up as soon as it was taken out, meaning that there was a spirit not far away from Wei WuXian.

Seeing the light of the fire, Wei WuXian held it to detect the spirit's direction, watching attentively. When he turned to the east, the fire weakened; when he turned to the west, the fire suddenly intensified. He walked a few steps toward the direction, and saw a white, stooping figure appear under a tree.

The talisman had finished burning, and the ashes fell from his fingertips. An old man was sitting with his back to him, speaking in faint murmurs.

Wei WuXian slowly approached. The words that the old man murmured became clear.

"It hurts, it hurts."

Wei WuXian asked, "Where does it hurt?"

The old man answered, "Head. My head."

Wei WuXian replied, "Let me take a look at it."

He walked a few steps to the side of the old man, and saw a bloodied, large hole on his forehead. This was a ghost, probably killed with a weapon which was smashed onto his head. He was dressed in a burial robe made with fine material and craftsmanship, meaning that he had already been encoffined and buried properly. This wasn't the soul that a living human had lost.

However, ghosts like this shouldn't have appeared on Dafan Mountain.

Wei WuXian did not find an explanation to this implausible scenario. Feeling quite worried, he jumped onto the donkey's back, slapped it with a shout, and rode toward the direction of where Jin Ling came up the mountain.

Around the area of the ancient tombs, there were a lot of cultivators who wandered around, in hope of . Somebody dared to hold a spirit-attraction flag, but only attracted a bunch of dark spirits who wept despairingly. Wei WuXian pulled on the reins, scanned around, and asked in a loud, clear voice, "Excuse me and sorry for the interruption, but where did the young masters from the Jin Clan and the Lan Clan go?"

Sure enough, after washing his face, people actually acknowledged him. One cultivator answered, "They left here, for Goddess Temple."

Wei WuXian spoke, "Goddess Temple?"

The rural clan from back then had sneaked up the mountain again and joined the group of night-hunters, after hearing that all of the deity-binding nets were destroyed. The middle-aged man recognized his clothing and the grimacing donkey, realizing that he was lunatic who'd saved them earlier. He felt quite awkward, and pretended that nothing had happened. Nonetheless, the round-faced girl showed him the path, "Over there. It's a divine temple in a cave on the mountain."

Wei WuXian inquired again, "Which deity is the temple built for?"

The round-faced girl spoke, "I, I think it's a natural stone statue of a goddess."

Wei WuXian nodded, "Thank you."

After the conversation, he immediately ran toward the direction of Goddess Temple.

The sluggard's marriage, lightning that destroyed coffins, the fiance eaten by wolves, the father and daughter losing their souls, the extravagant burial clothes… It was as if a string was being pulled through all of the beads, tying everything into one perfect strand. No wonder the

compasses of evil didn't pick up anything, and the spirit-attraction flags didn't work either. Everyone had underestimated the creature in Dafan Mountain.

It wasn't at all what they thought it was!

Translator's Notes

: This literally translates to "three types of poison".

* : This proverb means that it is impossible to determine who's more powerful and who will win, if a match happens between the two of them.

& : This literally translates to "purple lightning".

* , : The two Chinese characters of the zither's name are exactly the same as Lan WangJi's name. The term is a Daoist phrase that means to "get rid of a heart of deceit". It usually refers to finding pleasure in tranquility, forgetting about material matters, and being at peace with the world. The name does, indeed, reflect WangJi's personality (that is, until the uke starts flirting with him).

& : This is Lan WangJi's birth name. The "Lan" surname means the color blue, and "Zhan" is an adjective that is often used to describe an azure blue. This also implies that, by calling him with his birth name, Wei WuXian used to be very close with him.

0 : Qiankun means "Heaven and Earth". A qiankun bag is basically a dimensional bag, holding a lot of items although it looks tiny.

! : Ancient Chinese people liked to carry everything around in gourds, from the average liquor to level-enhancing elixirs that help with cultivation.

: This proverb originated from a story of a farmer who didn't want to do actual work and waited for a rabbit to kill itself by crashing into a tree. It describes the act of waiting.

Chapter 9 Arrogance—Part Four

On the other hand, Lan SiZhui and the other disciples did not find anything in the area of the ancient tombs, and had moved on to search for clues in Goddess Temple.

In Dafan Mountain, aside from the tombs of the Buddha's Feet ancestors, there was also the Goddess Temple. The being of worship was neither Buddha nor ! + , but the statue of a "dancing goddess."

A few hundred years ago, a hunter from Buddha's Feet ventured into the mountains, and found an extraordinary stone in a cave. It was around three meters in height, formed naturally, and appeared strangely like a human, with four limbs making a dancing pose. The more peculiar thing was that human features could vaguely be seen on the statue, appearing to be that of a smiling lady.

The townspeople of Buddha's Feet were all astonished, and thought that it was a magical stone formed by gathering the energy of Heaven and Earth, making up a series of legends about it. Some told the story of an falling in love with the ! 1 ' , and carved a stone statue from the goddess's appearance to convey the hardships of being lovesick. After discovering this, the goddess was furious, so the unfinished statue had to be left alone. Others told the story of the " $ and his beloved daughter who died young. The emperor's longing for his daughter had, supposedly, turned into this statue.

Anyhow, there were all sorts of myths, able to make anyone gawk. In the end, the townspeople themselves also started to believe in these legends which came out of their own mouths. Hence, someone turned the stone cave into a temple, and the stone platform into a holy seat. The statue was named "Dancing Goddess," and there were worshippers all year round.

The inside of the cave was spacious, similar to the size of an , , with the statue of the goddess set in the center. At first sight, it did indeed look like a human—the maiden's waist could even be considered lithe and graceful. However, after taking a closer look at it, it would seem rougher. Then again, a naturally-formed statue being so similar to an actual human was enough to make most people gasp in awe.

Lan JingYi lifted and lowered the compass of evil, but its pointer still didn't move. A thick layer of incense ashes covered the table for offerings, and disordered candles lay on there as well. A sickly sweet scent came from the plates for holding fruits. Most of the people from the GusuLan Sect had some degree of minor mysophobia. He fanned at the air in front of his nose and spoke, "The locals said that it is quite effective to pray at Goddess Temple, but how can it be this ruined? They should at least come and clean once in awhile."

Lan SiZhui spoke, “There has already been seven people who lost their souls. Everyone is saying that lightning has let out a fierce creature from the ancient graves of Buddha’s Feet, so would anybody dare to come up the mountain? There is no attendance at the temple and so, naturally, there is nobody to clean the place.”

A disdainful voice came from outside of the cave, “It’s only a stupid rock, given the title of a goddess by who-knows who, and people dare to put it here, accepting incense and worship!”

Jin Ling came inside, with his hands crossed behind his back. The time limit for the silence spell was not long, so his mouth could already open. However, nothing nice came out of that mouth of his, as he looked at the goddess statue and humphed, “These rural villagers don’t work hard when they face difficulties, but instead pray to the Buddha and other things every day. There are thousands and millions of people in the world, but gods and buddhas are already hands-full with their own matters, so who would care about them? Let alone a powerless goddess without status, like this one. If it’s really that effective, then I’m gonna pray for the soul-consuming creature in Dafan Mountain to appear in front of me right now. Can the statue do it?”

A few cultivators from smaller clans came in behind him, and everyone laughed right after hearing him, agreeing with his words. The originally quiet temple became bustling with noise, after the group of people had rushed forth, and the space also seemed more cramped. Lan SiZhui silently shook his head, turning around and glancing without any aim. His gaze landed on the head of the goddess statue; the features of a compassionately smiling face could vaguely be seen.

Yet, he felt a strange sense of familiarity toward the smile, as if he had seen it somewhere before this.

Where on Earth had he seen it before?

Lan SiZhui thought that it must be a very important matter, and couldn’t help but to approach the statue, wanting to examine the goddess’s features carefully. At the same time, someone bumped into him.

A cultivator who was originally standing behind him had fallen down without any noise. The others were alert with surprise. Jin Ling spoke in a vigilant tone, “What happened to him?”

Lan SiZhui held his sword and bent down to examine it. There was nothing wrong with the cultivator’s breathing, like he had just suddenly fallen asleep. Yet, no matter how hard he was pushed or called, he would not wake up. Lan SiZhui stood up, “He seems as if…”

Before he finished his sentence, the dark cave abruptly lit up. The cave was suddenly covered in a red light, as if a waterfall of blood was rolling off its walls. The candles on the platform for offerings and in the corners of the cave had ignited on their own.

With a few , everyone in the cave had either drawn their swords or taken out their talismans. At the same time, a person suddenly burst in from outside the temple, holding a gourd of medicinal alcohol. He threw it toward the stone statue, and raging flames sprouted from it, illuminating the stone cave so that it could even pass for daytime.

Wei WuXian used up all of the items he had found in the qiankun bag. He threw it away and shouted, "Everyone, go back outside! Be cautious of the soul-consuming goddess on the inside!"

Someone yelled in surprise, "The goddess's pose had changed!"

Before, the statute clearly had one foot lifted and both of its arms raised upward, of which one was pointing directly at the sky, its form graceful. However, amid the crimson and yellow flames, it had lowered both its arms and its foot. There was no doubt—it definitely wasn't a mistake of the eye!

The next moment, the statue lifted one foot again, and stepped out of the fire!

Wei WuXian shouted, "Run, run, run! Stop slashing around! It won't work!"

Most of the cultivators ignored him. The soul-consuming monster that they had tried so hard to find had finally appeared, so why would they miss out on the chance? However, even with so many swords chopping and stabbing, and so many talismans and magical tools being thrown at it, the statue's advance didn't stop at all. It was around three meters tall, resembling a titan as it moved, giving off a strong sense of oppression. It picked up two cultivators and lifted them in front of its face. The stone mouth seemed like it opened and closed, and the swords in the cultivators' hands dropped to the ground with two . Their heads drooped. Their souls were sucked away.

With no attack methods working properly, the others were finally willing to listen to Wei WuXian's words. Everyone gushed outside, scattering in all directions as fast as they could. With so many people and faces, the more anxious Wei WuXian became, the longer it took to find Jin Ling. Wei WuXian rode on the donkey and ran into a bamboo forest, encountering the juniors from the Lan Clan as he turned around. Wei WuXian called for them, "Children!"

Lan SiZhui replied, "Who are your children? Do you know which sect we are from? Did you really think that you would be considered a senior just because you washed your face?"

Wei WuXian spoke, “Okay, okay, okay, -s. Send a signal and get your clan’s… HanGuang-Jun up here!”

The juniors nodded a few times, and ran around while searching for signals. Lan SiZhui spoke, “The signal firelights… were all used up during the night at Mo Village.”

Wei WuXian was shocked, “You guys didn’t restock afterwards?”

The signal firelights were usually only needed once in over eight hundred years. Lan SiZhui replied bashfully, “We forgot.”

Wei WuXian tried to scare them, “Is this a matter that you should forget about? If HanGuang-Jun knew about this, he’s going to make you sorry.”

Lan JingYi’s face was pale with terror, “It’s over. This time, we are gonna be punished to death by HanGuang-Jun…”

Wei WuXian, “Indeed, he should punish you! Without punishment, you wouldn’t remember the next time.”

Lan SiZhui, “Young Master Mo, Young Master Mo! How did you know that it was not a spirit-consuming spirit or beast, but the goddess statue instead?”

Wei WuXian searched for Jin Ling as he ran, “How did I know? I saw.”

Lan JingYi also caught up. They each ran on one side of him, “What did you see? We also saw lots of things.”

“You saw, so what happens next? What things were in the area of the ancient tombs?”

“What else could there be? There were only dead souls.”

“Correct, there were dead souls. This is why it can’t be a soul-consuming spirit or beast. It’s simple—if it was either of these two, with so many dead spirits in the area, would it have chosen to not eat them? No, it wouldn’t have.”

This time, there were more than one person who asked, “Why?”

“Just what can I say about your GusuLan Sect…” Wei WuXian could not tolerate it any more, “Why can’t you teach less annoying, lengthy nonsense like cultivational etiquette, family trees, and history which requires memorization, and teach more practical things? How is this hard to understand? Dead souls are a lot easier to absorb than living souls. The physical body of a living person is like a shield, and if it wants to eat a live soul, it would have to break the shield. For example…” He looked at the donkey, which panted while running, rolling its eyes, “For example, if an apple is put in front of you, and another one is put inside a locked box, which one would you choose to eat? Of course, it would be the one in front of you. This creature only eats living souls, and knows of a way to obtain them. It is both powerful and selective in terms of food.”

Lan JingYi was astonished, “So that’s how it works? It makes a lot of sense! Wait, so you’re really not a lunatic?”

Lan SiZhui explained as he ran, “We all thought that, because the landslide and lightning led to the series of events, it must be a soul-consuming spirit.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “Wrong.”

“What is wrong?”

“The order and the correlation is wrong. Let me ask you—for the landslide and the soul-consuming events, which ones were the first and second, the cause and effect?”

Lan SiZhui answered without thinking twice, “The landslide was the first, and the soul-consumption was the second. The first was the cause, and the latter was the effect.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “Completely wrong. The soul-consumption was first, and the the landslide was second. The soul-consumption was the cause, and the landslide was the effect! During the night of the landslide, a storm suddenly started, and a streak of lightning broke a coffin—remember this. This first person to lose their soul, the sluggard, was trapped in the mountains for the whole night, and married a few days later.”

Lan JingYi asked, “Where is it wrong?”

Wei WuXian replied, “It is all wrong! Where would a good-for-nothing and penniless person obtain the money to form such a grand wedding?”

The boys were rendered speechless. But, it couldn’t have been helped, since the GusuLan Sect was a sect that did not need to worry about matters of wealth. Wei WuXian spoke again, “Did

you take a look at all of the dead souls floating in Dafan Mountain? There was an old man who died from a hit to the head, wearing burial clothes that were made with fine craftsmanship and fabric. With such extravagant burial clothes, his coffin couldn't have been empty, and there must have been a few burial items to protect it. The coffin that was broken by the lightning was most likely his. Yet, the people who came to retrieve the corpse did not find any burial items, which meant that they were definitely taken away by the sluggard, explaining why he suddenly became rich. The sluggard suddenly decided to marry someone after the night of the landslide, so something unusual must have happened during the night. On that evening, there was a harsh storm and he took cover in the mountain. Where on Dafan Mountain is it possible to take cover from the rain? Goddess Temple. And, when most people go into a temple, there is one thing that they would do."

Lan SiZhui asked, "Pray?"

"That's right. For example, he would pray for himself to be lucky, to become wealthy, to have enough money to marry, and so on. The goddess fulfilled his wish with the lightning that split open the grave, letting him see the treasures in the coffin. His prayers came true and, as the sacrifice, the goddess came to him on the evening of his marriage, and took his soul away!"

Lan JingYi, "All of these are just your guesses, right?"

Wei WuXian, "Yes, they are guesses. But, following this train of logic, all of the things that happened afterward could be explained."

Lan SiZhui, "How can this explain what happened with the girl, A-Yan?"

Wei WuXian, "Great question. You guys probably asked around before you came up the mountain. A-Yan had just got engaged during those days. All recently-engaged girls will definitely have the same wish."

Lan JingYi was befuddled, "What wish?"

Wei WuXian replied, "None other than something that goes like, 'I wish my husband would love me and care for me for his whole life, attracted to only myself'."

The boys were at a loss, "Would a wish like this really be able to be granted?"

Wei WuXian held his palms out, "It's simple. If her husband's 'whole life' immediately ended, wouldn't it count as 'loving only one person for his entire life'?"

Lan JingYi finally understood and shouted excitedly, “Oh, oh! So, so, so, the reason behind her husband being eaten by wolves the day after her engagement was that it was highly possible for A-Yan to have been to Goddess Temple to pray!”

Wei WuXian , “It was hard to say whether he was attacked by a wolf or something else. There is another factor that is unique to A-Yan: why is that, out of all of the victims, only A-Yan’s soul returned? How is she different from everyone else? The difference is that she has a relative who also lost his soul. Or, in other words, a relative replaced her! Blacksmith Zheng is A-Yan’s father, especially one who loved his daughter. So, when he saw that his daughter lost her soul, and there were no ways to deal with it, what was the only thing that he could do?”

This time, Lan SiZhui was quick to reply, “He could only entrust his hope to the Heavens. Therefore, he also went to Goddess Temple to pray, the wish being ‘I wish my daughter A-Yan’s soul can be found’!”

Wei WuXian spoke with appraise, “This is why only A-Yan’s soul came back, and also the reason behind Blacksmith Zheng losing his soul. However, although A-Yan’s soul was given back, it was still slightly fractured. After her soul returned, she had unconsciously started to imitate the goddess statue’s dance and even its smile.”

The similarity of the people who lost their souls was that, most likely, they had all prayed in front of the goddess statue. The prices to pay for their wishes were their souls.

The goddess statue was originally just an average rock which happened to look like a person. Having accepted a few hundred years’ worth of worship without any reason, it had gained some powers. Yet, because it was greedy and its thoughts ventured off the wrong path, it had wanted to quickly increase its powers by eating souls. These were souls that it obtained by means of swapping wishes, and could be considered as the voluntarily sacrificed souls of the people who prayed. The two sides had a fair deal, one wish for another, and it seemed to be just and moral. This was why the pointers of the compasses of evil did not move, why the spirit-attraction flags did not work, and why the powers of the swords and talismans were all nullified—the creature in Dafan Mountain wasn’t any sprite, demon, ghost, or monster, but a goddess! This was an untitled goddess born from the hundreds of years of incense. Using the items used to deal with evil spirits and beasts to deal with it would be like using fire to distinguish fire!

Lan JingYi shouted loudly, “Wait! Before this, in the temple, someone’s soul was also taken away, but we didn’t hear him wish!”

Wei WuXian's heart suddenly jumped. He stopped his footsteps, "Someone's soul was taken away in the temple? Describe to me everything that happened earlier, without missing a single word."

Lan SiZhui repeated the scenario both clearly and quickly. When he heard Jin Ling's talk of "if it's really that effective, then I'm gonna pray for the soul-consuming creature in Dafan Mountain appear in front of me right now. Can the statue do it?", Wei WuXian spoke, "How is this not wishing? It most definitely is a wish!"

The others agreed with Jin Ling, so it was accepted that they had all wished the same thing. At the time, the soul-consuming goddess was right in front of them, so the wish was granted. Then, it was time to seize the sacrifice!

Suddenly, the donkey halted, and ran toward the opposite direction. Wei WuXian was, again, swung off unpreparedly, but grabbed on to the rope no matter what. However, in the bushes in front of him, there came a noise of chewing, complete with crunches and slurps. An immense figure was crawling in the bush, its huge head on the ground and moving using its stomach. Hearing the noise, it immediately lifted its head. Their eyes met.

In the beginning, the soul-consuming goddess's features were vague, and there were only the shapes of eyes, nose, mouth, and ears on its face, but after it had eaten the souls of a few cultivators all at once, it could already form clear features. It was the face of a smiling woman, with blood dripping down the corners of its mouth, munching on an arm that had been torn off.

Everyone, following the donkey, ran in the other direction.

Lan SiZhui was breaking down, "That is not supposed to happen! The YiLing Patriarch had said before, that high-level ones eat souls, and only low-level ones eat flesh!"

Wei WuXian couldn't help but to comment, "Why are you blindly worshipping him? Even his own inventions were a mess! No rules stay the same in all situations. You can think of it as an infant—when it lacks teeth, it can only eat congee and soup, but when it grows up, it would, of course, also want to eat meat using its teeth. Her powers had just risen greatly, so naturally she'd want to taste something new!"

The soul-consuming goddess stood up from the ground. Her body was tall. She used her arms and her legs to dance with uncontrollable excitement, seeming like she was extremely pleased. Out of the blue, an arrow came with a " and pierced her forehead, the arrowhead appearing out of the back of her head.

Hearing the sound of the bow's release, Wei WuXian's looked toward its direction. Jin Ling stood atop a tall hill, not far away, and already had his second feathered arrow on the bow. He pulled to the maximum, and another head-penetrating arrow was released, the strength causing the soul-consuming goddess to stagger a few steps backward.

Lan SiZhui yelled, "Young Master Jin! Send off the signal on you!"

Jin Ling turned a deaf ear to his words, determined to kill the monster. With a solemn face, he set three arrows onto the bow at once. Although she was shot in the head twice, the soul-consuming goddess was not angered, and advanced toward Jin Ling with the same smile plastered on her face. Although she danced while walking, her speed was terrifyingly fast, decreasing the distance between them by half in just a few moments. A few cultivators appeared from the side and fought with her, hindering her strides. Jin Ling shot each arrow as the goddess took each step, probably intending to use up all of the feathered arrows first, before fighting in a closer range with the soul-consuming goddess. His arm was quite steady, and his shots were accurate, but all magical weapons were useless against it!

Both Jiang Cheng and Lan WangJi were at Buddha's Feet, waiting for any news, so who knows how long it would take for them to realize that something was wrong and come up here. To extinguish fire, water was needed. Therefore, if magical weapons didn't work, what about dark sorcery?

Wei WuXian unsheathed the sword on Lan SiZhui's waist and chopped off a piece of a thin bamboo, swiftly making it into a flute. He lifted it up in front of his lips and took a deep breath. The shrill timbre of the flute was like an arrow, slicing through the night sky and shooting into the clouds.

This should have been a last resort for him, but however, with the situation already like this, it didn't matter what he summoned. It'd be fine as long as the dark energy was strong enough and the killing intent was keen enough, so that it could rip the soul-consuming goddess into pieces!

Lan SiZhui was shocked to the point that he couldn't even move, while Lan JingYi covered his ears, "Look at what situation we are in, and you are still playing the flute? It sounds horrible!"

In the battle, three or four of the cultivators who were fighting with the soul-consuming goddess had lost their souls. Jin Ling pulled out his sword. He was already less than two # away from the soul-consuming goddess. His heart thumped like crazy and all of the blood in his body went toward his head, " " " 4
$

At the same time, from within the forests of Dafan Mountain, a tinkling sound appeared.

3 , . It was sometimes faster, sometimes slower; sometimes pausing, sometimes continuing. It echoed in the silent woods, resembling the sound of iron chains colliding and being dragged on the ground. It came closer, and became louder.

For some reason, the sound gave the people an uneasy sense of threat. Even the soul-consuming goddess stopped dancing. It raised it arms, blankly staring into the dark of which the sound came from.

Wei WuXian put away his flute and carefully looked into the direction.

The ominous feeling that he felt became stronger and stronger, but because it was willing to come due to the summoning, it would at least be something that listened to him.

Then, all of a sudden, the noise stopped. A figure emerged from within the darkness.

After having a clear view of the figure and the face, the cultivators' expressions became twisted.

Even when facing the goddess statue that could suck away their souls at any minute, the group did not cower or show any fear, but however, their shouting voices right now were filled with terror that they could not conceal.

"... The 'Ghost General', it's the 'Ghost General', it's Wen Ning!"

The title of the "Ghost General" was as infamous as that of the YiLing Patriarch's. Most of the time, the two appeared together.

The word only referred one person—the right-hand man of the YiLing Patriarch Wei Ying, who had helped with the tyrant's crimes, stirred up wind and waves, played the jackal to the tiger, overturned the world with him, and most of all, was a fierce corpse who should have been turned into ashes a long time ago—Wen Ning!

Word Cou

Translator's Notes

! + : This is the most famous goddess in the traditional religion of China. She originated from a male Bodhisattva in Buddhism—when the religion was passed through the Silk Road, she somehow ended up becoming a female goddess.

: An immortal is a heavenly being or someone from the heavens. They can either be born an immortal or become an immortal through practices such as cultivation. All cultivators aim to become an immortal.

! 1 ' : This is the goddess of war, sexuality, and longevity (“Wikipedia”).

" $: He is the monarch of all deities in heaven, from the Daoist religion or just Chinese folklore in general.

$, : This is a type of temple which is usually set in remote mountains or forests, with monks living in them and few visitors. Because of its nature, erjin temples are usually quite large in size.

! : This means “older brother”.

: This proverb means to grab onto a good chance/opportunity when it comes

& : One zhang is around 3.3 meters.

Chapter 10 Arrogance—Part Five

Wen Ning's head was slightly lowered and his arms hung down, as if he was a marionette waiting for the orders of his master.

His face was pale and delicate, and could be considered handsome in a melancholy sort of way. However, there were no pupils in his eyes, but only a flat cloud of white, along with a number of black, cracking lines which climbed up his face from his neck, so the melancholy turned into a frightening gloom. The lower hem and sleeves of his robe were ragged and torn, showing a pair of wrists that were the same ashen shade as his face, with black cuffs and chains on both his wrists and ankles. The tinkling sound was produced when he dragged the iron chains on the ground. If he stopped moving, everything would be silent again.

It wasn't hard to guess why all of the cultivators were scared out of their wits. Wei WuXian wasn't any calmer than any of them either. In fact, the storm in his chest had already crashed over the top of his head.

It wasn't that Wen Ning shouldn't be , but that Wen Ning shouldn't be in this world at all. He was turned into ashes even before the siege at Luanzang Hill.

Hearing the others call Wen Ning's name, Jin Ling's blade, which originally pointed at the direction of the soul-consuming goddess, couldn't help but to turn toward another direction. Seeing that he was distracted, the soul-consuming goddess gladly extended her arm and picked him up.

As Wei WuXian saw her opened mouth approaching Jin Ling, he didn't have time to be surprised. He raised the wooden flute again, hands slightly shaking, and therefore, the notes that he played also trembled. Aside from this, the flute was roughly crafted, so the sound produced could be described as coarse and unpleasant to the ear. With two notes, Wen Ning started to move.

Within the blink of an eye, he had already shifted in front of the soul-consuming goddess. Wen Ning used the side of his palm and gave a blow. The soul-consuming goddess's neck cracked, and although her body didn't move, her head was twisted around because of the force. She faced the direction of which her back originally faced, but kept on smiling. Wen Ning gave another blow with his hand, and the soul-consuming goddess's right hand, which was holding Jin Ling, was cleanly cut off.

She bowed her head to look at the wrist which broke off sharply. Instead of turning her head toward the correct direction, her entire body turned around, so that she was facing Wen Ning

with her face and her back. Wei WuXian didn't dare to relax. He took a deep breath and commanded Wen Ning to fight. However, not long had passed, and he became even more shocked.

Low-level corpses were unable to think on their own and needed his orders to lead them. Powerful , on the other hand, were usually delirious or unconscious. Yet, Wen Ning's case was different—he was created by Wei WuXian, which meant that he could easily be called the strongest fierce corpse in the current world. He was the only one who was capable of thought. Aside from not fearing injuries, fire, the cold, poison, and whatever living humans feared, he was the same as a one.

However, at that moment, Wen Ning clearly wasn't conscious!

He was both shocked and doubtful as a few cries of alarm came threshing from the crowd. Using both his arms and legs, Wen Ning had secured the soul-consuming goddess on the ground. He picked up a rock which lay on the side, taller than the height of humans, and lifted it above the soul-consuming goddess. He started to slam it onto her with great force. Each strike sounded as loud as thunder, continuing until the stone body of the soul-consuming goddess was pounded to pieces!

Amid the white pile of rocks scattered on the ground, a marble-sized sphere rolled out, radiating a circle of light in the color of snow. It was the core that condensed in the soul-consuming goddess after she devoured the souls of ten-or-so living people. If it was brought back and handled carefully, some people, who had their souls eaten recently, could be restored back to life. However, at the moment, nobody made any effort to pick up the sphere. The blades which were aimed at the soul-consuming goddess all turned around.

One cultivator shouted at the top of his lungs, "Close in on him!"

Some people replied hesitantly, but more people were indecisive, walking backward slowly. The cultivator shouted again, "Fellow cultivators, we have to block him so that he doesn't escape. This is 5 we're facing!"

These words convinced the crowd. What was a mere soul-consuming monster compared to the Ghost General? Although the reason as to his appearance was unknown, it was obvious that killing one thousand soul-consuming spirits couldn't even compare to capturing one single Wen Ning. After all, this was the most obeying mad dog under the YiLing Patriarch, which bit people without making any noise. If it was captured, they would surely become famous in the cultivation world and quickly rise to success! Their original goal from attending the Dafan Mountain night-hunt was to fight for , beasts, and evil spirits to add to their experiences.

With the shouts, it was certain that some people were interested. Yet, the older cultivators who saw with their own eyes how wild Wen Ning was when he broke out were still cautious to make a move. Hence, the person shouted once more, “What are you scared of? It’s not as if the YiLing Patriarch is here right now.”

After another thought, the words made sense to them. What was there to be scared of? His master was already in pieces!

With these remarks, the ring of swords which circled around Wen Ning had suddenly decreased in size. Wen Ning waved his arm, and the black iron chains swept past heavily, hitting the swords so that the directions of their blades slanted off to the side. Right afterward, he took a stride forward and gripped the neck of the person closest to him. With a light pull, he was lifted off the ground. Seeing the situation, Wei WuXian knew that the flute notes were too hurried and abrupt, causing him to develop a killing intent. To stifle it, Wei WuXian calmed his feelings and assuredly played another melody.

The melody had drifted over his mind naturally. It was relaxed and tranquil, contrasting with the bizarre and ear-piercing one from before. Hearing the sound, Wen Ning froze, and slowly turned toward the direction of which the melody came from. Wei WuXian stood in the same spot, staring into his pupil-less eyes.

After a moment, Wen Ning released his hand, throwing the cultivator on the ground. He let down his arms and walked toward Wei WuXian at a slow pace.

His head was lowered and he dragged a large amount of iron chains, even seeming as if he looked dejected. Wei WuXian retreated while playing the flute, guiding him to follow. Walking like this for a short distance, they moved into the forest, when suddenly, Wei WuXian caught the chilly scent of sandalwood.

Immediately after, his back bumped into someone. With an abrupt pain on his wrist, the flute melody had stopped. Wei WuXian thought, , and turned around to look. His sight collided with Lan WangJi’s eyes. They were light-colored to the point of appearing to be physically cold.

The situation looked unpromising. Lan WangJi had seen him use the flute to control corpses with his own eyes.

Lan WangJi used one hand to steadily grip Wei WuXian. Wen Ning stood still at about two zhang away from them, slowly looking around as if he was searching for the flute melody that had suddenly disappeared. From far into the forest, the light of flames and sound of human voices were spreading. Wei WuXian thought quickly and made his decision at once—so what, if

Lan WangJi had seen him do this before? There were tens of thousands of people who knew how to play the flute, and the number of people who imitated the YiLing Patriarch's method of using it to control corpses could form a sect on their own. He wouldn't confess no matter what!

He decisively ignored the hand that gripped him and raised his arm to continue playing. This time, the tempo was faster, as if it was urging or scolding. His air was not steady and each note cracked at the end, sounding shrill and harsh. Suddenly, Lan WangJi's hand tightened, almost causing his wrist to break. Wei WuXian's fingers loosened from the pain and the wooden flute dropped to the ground.

Fortunately, his orders were clear enough. Wen Ning retreated quickly, disappearing into the dark and gloomy forest without a sound. Wei WuXian feared that Lan WangJi would chase after Wen Ning, so he backhandedly grabbed him instead. But, surprisingly, Lan WangJi never even looked at Wen Ning once, but stared at Wei WuXian the whole time. The two stood face to face, gripping each other's arms, and stared.

At the same time, Jiang Cheng arrived.

He maintained his patience and waited for the results in Buddha's Feet, but before he finished a single cup of tea, a disciple ran from the mountain hastily and told him about how powerful and cruel the thing in Dafan Mountain was. Hearing this, his heart jumped and he rushed up here again. He shouted, "A-Ling!"

Jin Ling almost had his soul taken away a moment ago, but he was fine now, and stood on the ground properly, "Uncle!"

Seeing that Jin Ling was safe, Jiang Cheng finally calmed down. Quickly afterward, he scolded angrily, "Didn't you bring signal firelights with you? Don't you know to use them when you meet something like this? What are you pretending to be strong for? Scram over here!"

Jin Ling was also angered from not capturing the soul-consuming goddess, "Weren't you the one who told me that I have to catch it? And, if I don't catch it, I shouldn't go see you?"

Jiang Cheng seriously wanted to slap the rotten brat so hard that he went back inside his mother's stomach. However, he really did say so himself, and he shouldn't prove himself wrong. He could only turn to the cultivators who lay collapsed on the ground, speaking with satire, "What on Earth could it be, beating you up in such a dignified way?"

Among the cultivators who wore differently-colored clothing, a bunch were the disguised disciples of the YunmengJiang Sect, ordered by Jiang Cheng to secretly assist Jin Ling, in case

he couldn't overcome the challenge. He was quite the responsible elder, going to such great lengths. One cultivator still hadn't overcome the shock, "Sect, Sect Leader, it's… It's Wen Ning…"

Jiang Cheng thought that he had misheard, "What did you say?"

The person replied, "Wen Ning is back!"

In an instant, shock, disgust, anger, and disbelief all crossed Jiang Cheng's face.

After a long while passed, he finally spoke bitterly, "The thing was ground to dust in front of everyone long ago, so how can it come back?"

The disciple spoke, "It really is Wen Ning! There's no way for it to be wrong! My eyes couldn't have mislooked!" He suddenly pointed to the side, "... He was the one who summoned him!"

Wei WuXian was still in a stalemate with Lan WangJi. Instantly, they were the center of everyone's attention. Jiang Cheng's lightning-like gaze also moved toward where he stood.

After a moment, the corners of Jiang Cheng's lips pulled into a twisted smile. His left hand started to unconsciously stroke the ring again. He spoke softly, "... Well, well. So you're back?"

He let go of his left hand, and a long whip dangled from it.

The whip was extremely slender. Like its name, it was a streak of purple lightning which sizzled, as if it had just been taken away from a sky full of storm clouds. He held one side of it in his grip. As it was brandished, it seemed to let out rapid slashes of lightning!

Before Wei WuXian moved, Lan WangJi had already placed his zither in front of him. With an assured stroke, it was as if a rock had created thousands of waves in water. The sound of the zither had created countless ripples in the air, colliding with Zidian. The latter waned, and the former waxed.

Jiang Cheng's considerations of "not rashly fighting with him" and "not displeasing the Lan Clan" were as if they were eaten by dogs. The night sky above Dafan Mountain's forest was sometimes surging with purple light, and sometimes as bright as daytime; there were sometimes deafening roars of thunder, and sometimes waves of the zither's notes. The rest of the cultivators quickly retreated into a safe distance away from the scene, standing on the side and watching. They were both frightened to death and staring in awe. After all, rarely did one have the chance to watch two famous cultivators of prominent families combat directly, which was why everyone

hoped that the fight was more violent and intense. Among these thoughts, there were also some unspeakable hopes for the relationship between the Lan Clan and the Jiang Clan to fall apart, creating an interesting scenario. On the other hand, Wei WuXian waited for his chance, and suddenly sprinted off.

The crowd was extremely surprised. He hadn't been hit by the whip yet only because Lan WangJi acted as a barricade in front of him. For him, running away like this was the same as seeking his own death!

Sure enough, as if eyes grew on his back, Jiang Cheng saw that he went outside Lan WangJi's area of protection, and was determined to grasp the chance. With a slanting crack of his whip, Zidian slashed out with the semblance of a poisonous dragon, precisely landing on the center of his back!

Wei WuXian was almost flung away from the attack of the whip. If not for the donkey blocking him, he would have directly crashed into a tree. However, after the blow, both Lan WangJi and Jiang Cheng stopped, looking quite stunned.

Wei WuXian massaged the back side of his waist, and crawled up with the support of the donkey. He hid behind it and yelled angrily, "How amazing! You really can do anything when you're from a powerful clan, can't you? You can even beat up anyone you want! 3 !"

Lan WangJi, "..."

Jiang Cheng, "..."

He was both shocked and enraged, "What is going on?"

One unique power of "Zidian" was that, if it hit someone who seized another's body, their soul and physical form would immediately separate. Without any exceptions, the person's soul would be whipped away from the body. Yet, Wei WuXian was still moving properly and running about after he was hit. The only explanation was that he did not seize this body.

Wei WuXian thought, 6 " 7
" $

Bewilderment could be seen on Jiang Cheng's face as he prepared to whip again, when Lan JingYi suddenly shouted, "Sect Leader Jiang, this should be enough, right? It was 6 !"

It was absolutely impossible for the first strike to fail and the second to succeed, for a magical weapon of such high level like Zidian. If nothing was taken out, nothing would be taken out; if it wasn't the seizing of a body, it wouldn't be the seizing of a body. In fact, the shout made Jiang Cheng, who cared about maintaining his reputation above anything else, unable to make another move.

However, if it wasn't Wei WuXian, who else could have summoned and controlled Wen Ning?

Even after thinking it over multiple times, Jiang Cheng still couldn't accept the fact. He pointed at Wei WuXian and scowled, "Who on Earth are you?"

Finally, a meddlesome bystander added a word to the conversation. He coughed, "Sect Leader Jiang, you might have not paid attention to these things so didn't know about this. Mo XuanYu was the LanlingJin Sect's… # , he used to be a foreign disciple of the Jin Sect. But, because his spiritual powers were low and he didn't work hard in his studies, and also had … He harassed a peer and was thrown out of the LanlingJin Sect. I've also heard that he lost his marbles? In my opinion, he was probably bitter from being unable to cultivate using the correct method, he ventured off onto the wrong path. It might not be… the YiLing Patriarch seizing this body."

Jiang Cheng asked, "3 ? Which?"

"That… As in …"

Someone couldn't help but to comment, "The ' penchant!"

Jiang Cheng's eyebrows twitched. His eyes which stared at Wei WuXian seemed more disgusted than before. There were more comments on the matter, but nobody dared to say them in front of Jiang Cheng.

Although he was infamous, people had to admit that, before the YiLing Patriarch Wei WuXian had betrayed the YunmengJiang Sect, he was known for being a handsome young man and a refined cultivator skilled in the - . He ranked the fourth among all of the young masters in the cultivation world, being described as lively and cheerful. On the other hand, the ill-tempered Sect Leader Jiang ranked five, surpassed by him, so most people weren't so bold as to mention the matter. Wei Ying was a frivolous and wanton person who loved to have tangled ties with pretty girls. Nobody knew how many female cultivators he had troubled with his charms, but it was yet unheard of that he was also attracted to men. Even if he wanted to steal a body and seek revenge… according to Wei Ying's taste, he definitely wouldn't have chosen a lunatic cut-sleeve who rode a donkey while eating fruits and painted his face to resemble a hanged ghost!

Someone else muttered, “It’s not him no matter how you look at it… The flute was also played horribly… This is definitely a case of blind imitation, hearing how inferior it sounded.”

During the “ ,” the YiLing Patriarch stood on the battlefield and played his flute throughout the whole night, controlling the ghost soldiers as if they were a living army. He swept away all obstacles—whether a human or god was standing in front of him, he had defeated them. The sound of his flute was as if it was played by an immortal, absolutely incomparable to the terrible moans made by the abandoned son of the Jin Clan. No matter how horrible Wei WuXian’s character was, it was too insulting to compare them like this.

Wei WuXian felt somewhat offended, + " ' '
" 1 "
$

A moment ago, Jiang Cheng was certain that this person was Wei WuXian, and all of the blood in his body started to boil. Yet, now, Zidian was clearly telling him that he wasn’t. Zidian definitely wouldn’t deceive him or make a mistake, so he quickly calmed himself and thought,
8

" " . After thinking it through, he made a gesture. The disciples understood his intention and came over.

Wei WuXian hurriedly jumped behind Lan WangJi with the donkey, and exclaimed while holding a hand over his chest, “# ! What are you going to do to me?”

Lan WangJi gave him a look, putting up with his extremely discourteous, noisy, and exaggerated behaviour.

Seeing that he had no means of moving over, Jiang Cheng spoke, “Second Young Master Lan, are you purposely making it difficult for me?”

Everyone in the cultivation world knew that the young leader of the Jiang Clan watched out for Wei WuXian in an almost crazed manner. He would rather catch the wrong person than let go of any possibility, and took anyone who seemed like they held the soul of Wei WuXian away to the YunmengJiang Sect, inflicting severe torture on his victim. If he wanted to take someone back, the opposition would surely lose half of their life. Lan SiZhui spoke, “Sect Leader Jiang. The evidence is clear—Mo XuanYu’s body was not taken. If so, why should you want to trouble an unimportant person such as him?”

Jiang Cheng replied coldly, “Then, why is Second Young Master Lan going to such great lengths to protect an unimportant person such as him?”

Out of the blue, Wei WuXian made a few sounds of suppressed laughter.

He spoke, “Sect Leader Jiang, , I’ll feel very troubled if you keep on bothering me like this.”

Jiang Cheng’s eyebrow twitched again. His instincts told him that this person would definitely not say anything that pleased him.

Wei WuXian spoke, “Thank you for being so enthusiastic. However, your thoughts are quite off. Even if I am attracted to men, I don’t like just any type of man, much less follow anyone who waves at me. For example, I’m not interested in ones like you.”

Wei WuXian was purposely trying to disgust him. Jiang Cheng had always hated being defeated while compared with others, no matter how pointless the comparison was. If anyone said that he wasn’t as good as someone else, he’d be angered and not think about anything else until he won against the person. As expected, Jiang Cheng’s face darkened, “Oh, really? Then, may I ask which type you’re interested in?”

Wei WuXian replied, “Which type? Well, I am very much attracted to people like HanGuang-Jun.”

Lan WangJi could not tolerate this sort of frivolous and foolish joke at all. If he felt disgusted, he would definitely draw a line between them and keep his distance. Disgusting two people at once—this was killing two birds with one stone!

However, as Lan WangJi heard this, he turned around.

His face was emotionless, “Mark your words.”

Wei WuXian, “Hmm?”

Lan WangJi turned back, speaking in a mannerly yet resolute way, “I will take this person back to the Lan Sect.”

Wei WuXian, “...”

Wei WuXian, “...Huh?”

Translator's Notes

2 : From now on, the term will describe the certain type of moving corpse/live corpse instead of a powerful corpse (with being part of the noun instead of an adjective to).

2 : This does not refer the Western fairies that fly around fluttering their miniscule wings. These will be further explained in a few chapters, but for a better understanding of the story, a fairy is formed when a living creature gains consciousness. This is sometimes translated as , such as the kitsune spirit in Japanese and Chinese folklore, but the term will be used here, so that it can be distinguished from the that also appears often.

' : This is another term for homosexuality (male-oriented only), originating from the ancient story of a homosexual emperor. When the emperor woke up, one day, his lover was still asleep, with the emperor's sleeve under him. Therefore, he cut off his sleeve when he left the bed, so that his lover wouldn't be woken up. This has been left like this because the term "homosexuality" sounds too scientific , while the term "gay" doesn't have that romantic or poetic feeling to it, and any other terms are somewhat offensive. This will be used as both noun and adjective.

- : Traditionally, the six arts involved rites, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics ("Wikipedia"). However, it is fine to not interpret this literally and assume that he was skilled in a lot of areas, in general.

: This does not have anything to do with brand names called "Sunshot." Literally, it means "the campaign to shoot down the sun," but it has been simplified. The nature of this campaign will be explained later in the story.

Chapter 11 Refinement—Part One

The residence of the Lan Sect was located in a remote mountain outside the city of Gusu.

Mist constantly enveloped the white walls and black roofs of the buildings, which stretched along the picturesque garden of the waterside pavilion, as if it was an ocean of clouds in the immortal realm. At dawn, the first rays of the morning sun shone through the hazy billows of mist that drifted far and wide, perfectly complementing its name—the " (."

In such a tranquil place, one's heart would be like still water. Only the echoes of the bell tower could be heard vibrating through the air. Although it was incomparable to a holy temple, the cold mountains still send forth a lonesome air of Zen.

However, the ambience was suddenly shattered by a long wail, giving a few shudders down the backs of the disciples who were training or doing their . They couldn't help but to glance at the direction of the main entrance, where the sound came from.

Wei WuXian was crying in front of the entrance, clinging onto his donkey. Lan JingYi spoke, "Stop crying! You said that you liked HanGuang-Jun yourself, so what are you wailing for, now that he has taken you back?"

Wei WuXian pulled a long face.

He never had the chance to summon Wen Ning again, after the night at Dafan Mountain. Neither did he have any opportunities to find out why Wen Ning was unconscious or why he had appeared in this world again, before he was carried back by Lan WangJi.

When he was in his early youth, he had came to study at the Lan Sect for three months, along with the disciples of other clans, so he had experienced the GusuLan Sect's dull, boring atmosphere in person. In fact, he still shuddered at the thought of the three-thousand-or-so sect rules which crammed onto the Wall of Discipline. As he was tugged up the mountain, he passed by the rock wall again, and saw that a thousand more were carved on. Now, there were more than four thousand. Four thousand!

Lan JingYi spoke, "There, there! Stop making a ruckus. Noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses."

He was making loud noises exactly because he didn't want to enter the Cloud Recesses!

If he was dragged inside, it would be extremely difficult for him to come outside again. Back then, when he came to study, all of the disciples were given a jade token for passage. Only with the token, would a person be able to enter and leave freely, or else they couldn't pass through the protective barrier of the Cloud Recesses. After ten years had passed, the security could only have gotten stricter, instead of looser.

Lan WangJi stood still in front of the entrance, turning a deaf ear to him, and watched the scene with an indifferent look. When Wei WuXian's voice had somewhat quieted, he spoke, "Let him cry. When he becomes tired, drag him inside."

Wei WuXian hugged the donkey and cried even harder, bumping his head against it.

How misfortunate! He thought that with a whip from Zidian, all of his doubts would be cleared. At the moment, he felt satisfied with himself and, along with his mouthful of teasing words, he offhandedly gave Lan WangJi a few repulsive comments. Yet, who knew that Lan WangJi didn't follow the routine he had followed before? What was this all about? Was it possible that, after so many years, his level of cultivation had increased, but he became more intolerant?

Wei WuXian spoke, "I'm attracted to men, so with so many beautiful young men in your sect, I'm afraid that I won't be able to control myself."

Lan SiZhui tried to reason with him, "Young Master Mo, it was for your sake that HanGuang-Jun brought you here. If you do not follow us, Sect Leader Jiang will not be willing to let the matter go. During these years, there were countless people whom he caught and took back to 3 , and none of those people were ever let out."

Lan JingYi spoke, "That is right. You have seen Sect Leader Jiang's methods, have you not? They are quite cruel…" He paused here, remembering the rule that stated "talking behind other people's backs" was prohibited, and secretly glanced at Lan WangJi. Seeing that HanGuang-Jun didn't show any means to chastise him, he was bold enough as to mumble on, "It is all because of the unhealthy trend that the YiLing Patriarch started. There are so many people who copy him and cultivate that foolish method. With Sect Leader Jiang being so suspicious of everyone, is it even possible for him to catch all of them? Just look at you and your flute skills… , ."

The told more words than what any sentences could describe. Wei WuXian felt like he really needed to defend himself, "Well, actually, you might not believe me, but I usually play the flute quite well…"

Before he finished his defense, a few white-clothed cultivators walked through the door.

Each person wore the Lan Sect's uniform, with flowing, plain robes as white as snow. The man standing in front was tall and slender. Hanging on his waist was a - made of white jade, aside from his sword. As Lan WangJi saw them, he slightly bowed his head to show respect, and the person did the same. He looked at Wei WuXian and smiled, "WangJi never brings guests home. This is?"

As the person stood in front of Lan WangJi, it was as if they were mirror images. However, the color of Lan WangJi's eyes was extremely light, as if they were tinted crystals, while his eyes were of a gentler, darker shade.

This was , the leader of the GusuLan Sect—& * " , 4 .

Each place brought up the same kind of people. The GusuLan Sect had always been known for nurturing a lot of handsome men, especially the , of the clan's current generation. Even though the two were not twins, they looked extremely similar to each other, which made it difficult to tell who was the superior one. Yet, although their appearances were similar, their personalities were not. Lan XiChen was gentle and benevolent, while Lan WangJi was overly aloof and stern, keeping everyone at an arm's length and being the opposite of amiable. This was why, in the list of the best-looking young masters in the cultivation world, the former ranked first, and the latter ranked second.

Lan XiChen proved himself worthy of being the leader of a sect. Even as he saw Wei WuXian embracing a donkey, he did not appear to be affected at all. Wei WuXian let go of the donkey with a beaming smile on his face and approached him. The GusuLan Sect placed a lot of regard on the order of seniority. If he talked nonsense to Lan XiChen, he would most definitely be chased off the Cloud Recesses. However, when he just got ready to show his capabilities, Lan WangJi looked at him. Immediately, his lips were sealed close.

Lan WangJi turned around and continued his polite conversation with Lan XiChen, "Brother, are you going to visit LianFang-Zun again?"

Lan XiChen nodded, "To negotiate about the next Discussion Conference at Jinlin Tower."

Wei WuXian was unable to open his mouth, so he sourly walked back to the donkey.

LianFang-Zun was the current leader of the LanlingJin Sect—Jin GuangYao, the only illegitimate son whom Jin GuangShan approved of. He was Jin Ling's youngest uncle, being half-blooded brothers with both Jin Ling's father, Jin ZiXuan, and Mo XuanYu. However, although they were both illegitimate sons, they were extremely different. While Mo XuanYu was in Mo Village, sleeping on the ground and eating leftovers, Jin GuangYao was sitting in the highest seat of the cultivation world, . If he wanted to talk to Lan XiCheng or initiate a Discussion Conference, he could do so however he wanted to. Then again, no wonder the sect leaders of the Lan and Jin sects personally went along quite well—after all, they were .

Lan XiChen spoke, "Uncle has taken and examined what you brought back from Mo Village."

Hearing the words "Mo Village", Wei WuXian automatically started to pay attention. Unexpectedly, he felt his lips part. Lan XiChen had released his silence and spoke to Lan

WangJi, “It is not often that you bring somebody home, being in such good spirits. You need to treat your guest with courtesy, unlike this.”

- Wei WuXian carefully looked at Lan WangJi’s face.

, " " $

After watching Lan XiChen leave, Lan WangJi spoke, “Drag him inside.”

Then, Wei WuXian was, indeed, dragged into a place which he swore not to step inside again.

In the past, only distinguished cultivators had came to visit the Lan Sect, and never had anyone seen a guest like him before. The juniors all crowded around him, interested by this new turn of events. If not for the sect rules being so strict, there would definitely be bouts of laughter along the journey. Lan JingYi asked, “HanGuang-Jun, where should we drag him to?”

Lan WangJi replied, “The , .”

“... The jingshi?!”

Wei WuXian didn’t know what was going on. The rest stared among themselves, afraid to make any sound.

It was HanGuang-Jun’s bedroom and study, which he had never invited anyone inside…

The furniture in the jingshi was extremely simplistic, without any unnecessary belongings. On the accordion partition, there was a painting of drifting clouds, floating and morphing with its fine brushwork. A / table lay horizontally in front of it. On top of the three-legged incense stand in the corner, a hollowed out incense burner made of white jade emitted soft, lingering smoke, filling the whole room with the chilling scent of sandalwood.

Lan WangJi went to see his uncle to discuss serious matters, while Wei WuXian was pushed into the room. Right after Lan WangJi left, Wei WuXian also went outside. He strolled around the Cloud Recesses, and found that, as he had expected, without the jade token for passage, even if he climbed up the white walls of a few zhangs’ height, he would be immediately flung off by the barrier, attracting the attentions of the nearby patrolmen at once.

Wei WuXian could only go back to the jingshi.

He never really worried about anything, no matter what he came across. He walked around the jingshi with his arms behind his back, firmly believing that, sooner or later, there would be a solution. The refreshing scent of the sandalwood was cold and clear. Although it wasn't sentimental, it had its own way of tugging one's heartstrings. With nothing to do, he started to think random thoughts, % 6 , "
" " "
.

After these thoughts, he couldn't help but to shift closer to the incense stand at the corner. With this shift, he became aware that, beneath his foot, one piece of wood was significantly different from the other places. Wei WuXian bent down and started to knock here and there, due to curiosity. In his past life, he did a lot of digging pits, excavating graves, and finding holes in the ground. After a few moments, he turned a piece of board up.

Finding a secretive space in Lan WangJi's room was already more than enough to surprise Wei WuXian. However, after he saw what was hidden inside, he was even more surprised.

After flipping the wooden board open, a mellow aroma had filled the air, unnoticeable when it was mixed with the sandalwood scent. Seven or eight black jars were packed into a small, square cellar.

Sure enough, Lan WangJi had changed—he even started to hide liquor!

The Cloud Recesses prohibited liquor. Because of this, the first time they met, they had a small fight. Lan WangJi ended up spilling a jar of the "Emperor's Smile" which he brought back from the city of Gusu.

After he returned from Gusu to Yunmeng, Wei WuXian never had the chance to drink the "Emperor's Smile" made exclusively by Gusu's experts ever again. He had thought about this for his entire life, always telling himself to come back to taste it if he ever received the opportunity. But, the opportunity never came. Hidden in here was no other than the liquor—he didn't even need to open and taste it, and knew that it was an "Emperor's Smile" just by the smell of it. He would never have thought that he would find a liquor-hiding vault in the room of a person as scrupulous and abstinent as Lan WangJi's. Karma really outdid itself with this reincarnation.

As Wei WuXian exclaimed upon the matter, he finished one jar already. He had a high tolerance for alcohol and loved to drink. After he came to the conclusion that Lan WangJi still owed him a jar of Emperor's Smile and it was time to collect his interests, he drank another jar. When he was just starting to get tipsy, a thought suddenly passed his mind. How hard was it to get the jade token? In the Cloud Recesses, there was a cold spring with a lot of miraculous effects, for the

male cultivators to use. It was said to be able to calm down one's heart, clear one's mind, / 5 , and so on. When he went into the cold spring, he was bound to take off his clothing. Then, with his clothing already off, there would be no where to put it aside from holding it in his mouth, which was definitely out of question.

Wei WuXian clapped his hands and finished the last gulp in the jar. After searching, he found that there were no places to throw it away, so he filled the empty jars with clear water and sealed the lids again, stuffing them back inside and closing the wooden board. With this done, he ventured out to find the jade token.

Although the Cloud Recesses had been burnt down before the "Sunshot Campaign" happened, the rebuilt structure of the area was the same. Wei WuXian walked through the winding paths from memory, and soon found the cold spring, situated at a quiet and obscure place.

The disciple on duty for watching over the cold spring was quite a distance away. The female cultivators were in another quarter of the Cloud Recesses and didn't come here to use it. Nobody in the Lan Sect did an impudent thing such as coming to the cold spring to watch others bathe, anyway. Therefore, the security wasn't strict at all and it was extremely easy to overcome, making it easy for Wei WuXian to go and shame himself. And, coincidentally, there was a set of white clothes on top of the white rocks behind the crisscrossed eupatorium grasses, meaning that someone had already came.

The set of white clothes was folded extremely neatly, almost making one's hair rise. It looked like a snow-white piece of tofu—even the forehead ribbon was folded without any creases. As Wei WuXian put his hand in and searched for the jade token of passage, he was almost reluctant to mess it up. Afterward, stepping over the bushes of eupatorium grasses, his gaze passed over the spring, and suddenly halted.

The water in the cold spring was freezing. Unlike a hot spring, there wasn't any vapour to shroud one's eyes, so it was possible to take a clear look at the upper half of the person in the spring who stood with his back to him.

The person in the spring was quite tall. His skin was fair and his hair was black, wet and gathered to one side. The lines which outlined his waist and back were smooth, graceful yet holding strength. In simpler terms, he was a beauty.

However, Wei WuXian was definitely not stunned and unable to avert his gaze because he was looking at a bathing beauty. No matter how beautiful he was, he wouldn't actually be attracted to men. Really, it was the things on the person's back that made him unable to avert his gaze.

There were dozens of intersecting scars.

They were the scars from a discipline whip. In the different sects, there was a type of discipline whip to punish disciples of that sect who made significant mistakes. After the torture, the scars would never disappear. Although Wei WuXian had never been hit by a discipline whip before, Jiang Cheng had been. Even after desperately trying, he couldn't make the disgracing imprint fade one bit. This was why Wei WuXian would never misremember scars like this.

Usually, with only one or two strikes of the discipline whip, it would already be enough of a punishment for the bearer to remember it for their whole life, never to make the same mistake ever again. The amount of scars on this person's back accumulated thirty at the least. Just what sort of monstrous crime did he commit for him to be whipped so many times? If it really was a monstrous crime, why didn't they kill him?

At the moment, the person in the spring turned around. Beneath his collarbone and near his heart, there was a clear sear. Seeing the sear, Wei WuXian's shock instantly reached its highest peak.

Translator's Notes

(: The name of the Lan Sect's residence came from the last phrase of Jia Dao's poem. A beautiful and accurate translation of this poem can be found here: http://chinesepoemsinenglish.blogspot.ca/2010/03/jia-dao-visiting-absent-hermit.html.

) : A common practice in China is for students to read out loud in their morning classes, because it makes them memorize the passages/teachings better.

3 : The specifics of this place will be explained later. However, this name also came from a poem. It was the name of a poem by the famous poet—Wang Wei. I cannot find the translation of this poem online, but it doesn't matter too much, as this doesn't influence anything in the story.

4 : This is a vertical flute.

, & * " , 4 : Lan Huan is his birth name, Lan XiChen is his common name, and ZeWu-Jun is his "alternative name" or "hao" (but, in case anyone forgot, a hao is a name given by one to oneself).

% , : This term refers to two people who are especially good at something, on a generally equal level.

: There is nothing special to this proverb. It just means that he is very powerful and could do whatever he wanted to do.

: The author of FoDC/GDC had stated that everyone in this book, apart from Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi, are straight. However, that does nothing to stop the fangirls from shipping practically every character with every other character. Feel free to ship Lan XiChen and Jin GuangYao, or any other characters you're interested in, whichever way you'd like to do so.

" : This literally translates into "quiet room". As there doesn't seem to be any appropriate terms for this in English, it is kept as pinyin.

! / : This is the term for the type of zither that Lan WangJi plays. In past chapters, it was referred to as a 7 , but the guqin is one specific type of zither, so it has been changed.

0 5 : Here, the exact term used is "quench one's evil fire". Wei WuXian may be referencing Chinese medicine, or he may be making an innuendo (which I happen to know because it is one of the most overused terms to describe the seme's desires in Chinese BL smut). Who knows?

Chapter 12 Refinement—Part Two

The sear took away all of Wei WuXian's attention, making him doubt that he had mislooked. He couldn't even pay attention to the person's face, and his breaths also stuttered for a few times.
Suddenly, a flash of white appeared before his eyes, as if snow had fallen before him. Quickly afterward, the blue glare of a sword penetrated through the snow, slashing toward him with an arctic blast of wind.

Who didn't know that it was HanGuang-Jun's famous sword— "Bichen"? Crap, it's Lan WangJi!

Wei WuXian was quite adept at running away and dodging swords. With a roll on the ground, he closely avoided the sword. He even had the time to pull off a leaf that stuck to his hair when he rushed out of the cold spring. He ran like a headless fly, right into a few people who were passing by from nightwatching. They grabbed him and scolded, "What are you running around for? Running is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses!"

Wei WuXian, seeing that it was Lan JingYi and the others, were ecstatic, thinking that he could finally be chased down the mountain. He presented himself at once, "I didn't see! I didn't see anything! I'm definitely not here to peep at HanGuang-Jun bathing!"

The juniors were shocked speechless by his impudence. No matter where he was, HanGuang-Jun was a high, holy mountain to behold in awe, especially respected among the junior disciples in the sect. He was near the cold spring to watch HanGuang-Jun bathe! Just thinking about such a thing would be the greatest crime, never to be forgiven. Lan SiZhui was frightened to the point that his voice even changed, "What? HanGuang-Jun? HanGuang-Jun is inside?!"

Lan JingYi seized him furiously, "You damn cut-sleeve! I-i-is he someone you could peek at?!"

Wei WuXian struck the iron when it was still hot and confirmed his conviction, "I didn't see a single peek of how HanGuang-Jun looks like without his clothes!"

Lan JingYi fumed, "You are saying that ! Well, if you did not, why are you sneaking around here? Look at you—you have no face to see anyone!"

Wei WuXian covered his face with his hands, "Don't be so loud… Noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses."

Amid the ruckus, Lan WangJi walked out from behind the layers of eupatorium grasses with his hair down, wearing a white robe. The conversation hadn't even finished yet, and he was already

dressed in an orderly fashion, Bichen still unsheathed. The juniors hurried to greet him. Lan JingYi rushed to speak, “HanGuang-Jun, Mo XuanYu really is awful. You only brought him back seeing that he assisted us at Mo Village, yet he… he…”

Wei WuXian thought that, this time, it would be beyond his endurance and kicked out of the sect. However, Lan WangJi only lightly glimpsed at him. After a moment of silence, he sheathed Bichen with a and spoke,“You are dismissed.”

It was only three toneless words, but it was powerful enough for no second option to be allowed. The crowd dispersed immediately, while Lan WangJi calmly held Wei WuXian by the back of his collar and dragged him toward the jingshi. In his past life, the two were of similar height, both somewhat slender and tall. Wei WuXian was only shorter than Lan WangJi by a tiny bit. When they stood together, the difference of less than one between them were almost unnoticeable. However, after waking up in another body, he was more than two cun shorter than Lan WangJi. While being held in his hand, he couldn’t even struggle against him. Wei WuXian staggered, wanting to shout, but Lan WangJi spoke coldly, “Those who make noise will be silenced.”

He would love to be thrown off the mountain, but wouldn’t want to be silenced. Wei WuXian couldn’t understand it at all—since when did the Lan Sect tolerate something as shameless as peeking at one of the Lan Clan’s most distinguished cultivators bathing?!

Lan WangJi carried him to the jingshi, walked straight toward the inner room, and threw him down onto the bed with a . Wei WuXian yelped from the pain. He couldn’t get up at the moment, wriggling upright after a while. He originally wanted to whine a few times in a flirtatious manner, so that he would detest him. However, as he raised his head, he saw that Lan WangJi was holding Bichen with one hand, looking down at him commandingly.

He was used to seeing Lan WangJi with his forehead ribbon, neat, long hair, scrupulous to every detail, but had never seen him like this, with his hair a bit loose and wearing thin clothing. Wei WuXian couldn’t help to glance a few more times. After the effort of carrying and throwing him on the bed, Lan WangJi’s collars, which were closed in the beginning, came slightly apart, showing his distinct collarbones and the deep red sear under them.

As he saw the sear, Wei WuXian’s attention was captured again.

When he hadn’t become the YiLing Patriarch yet, he also had a sear like this on his body.

And, the sear on Lan WangJi's body was exactly the same as the one on his body in his past life, no matter the position or the shape, so it was only natural for him to recognize it and become surprised.

Speaking of it, aside from this sear, the thirty-or-so scars of the discipline whip on his back were also surprising.

Lan WangJi became famous at a young age. With his high appraisal, he was one of the most acknowledged cultivators in the cultivation world, and also part of the Two Jades of which the GusuLan Sect was so proud of. Every word and action of his was set as examples of excellence by the elders of each sect for their disciples. Just what unforgivable mistake did he make for him to be punished like this?

Seeing from the thirty-or-so scars of the discipline whip, the executor might as well have killed him. As soon as the discipline whip had been delivered, it wouldn't disappear for the rest of the bearer's life, so that they would remember it forever and never make the same mistake again.

Following his gaze, Lan WangJi lowered his eyes. He pulled his collar so that it covered his collarbones and sear, becoming the indifferent HanGuang-Jun once again. At the moment, the deep toll of the bell came from far away.

The Lan Sect had strict sect rules, including a precise schedule of sleeping at nine in the evening and rising at five in the morning. The bell was a reminder for that. Lan WangJi listened attentively to the tolls, and spoke to Wei WuXian, "You will be sleeping here."

Without giving Wei WuXian a chance to reply, he turned to another compartment of the jingshi, leaving Wei WuXian alone, sprawled on the bed alone and feeling confused.

He did doubt that Lan WangJi might have guessed who he was. However, the doubt was lacking in both sense and reason. As sacrificing one's body was a prohibited practice, there were probably not a lot of people who knew about it. The scrolls passed down the generations were most likely partial pieces of the entire work, unable to reach their full potential. Things continued like this, and so there were less and less people who believed in it. Mo XuanYu only summoned Wei WuXian by looking at a secret scroll, wherever he found it in the first place. Anyhow, Lan WangJi couldn't have recognized him just from the awful flute melodies that he played.

He asked himself whether or not he had a heartfelt relationship with Lan WangJi in his past life. Although they had studied with each other, went on adventures, and fought together, all of these experiences were like falling petals and flowing water—coming and going. Lan WangJi was a disciple of the GusuLan Sect, which meant that he had to be "righteous," quite incompatible with

Wei WuXian's personality. Wei WuXian thought that their relationship wasn't exactly bad, but it wasn't that good either. The chances were that Lan WangJi's opinion of him was the same as everyone else's—being overly wanton and not virtuous enough, it would have been only a matter of time before he caused a disaster. After Wei WuXian betrayed the YunmengJiang Sect and became the YiLing Patriarch, he had a few significant disputes with the Lan Sect, especially during the few months before his death. If Lan WangJi was sure that he was Wei WuXian, they should have already been engaged in a large-scale fight.

Yet, he wasn't sure what to make of the current situation—in the past, no matter what he did, Lan WangJi didn't tolerate anything, but now, even though he used whatever methods he had up his sleeve, Lan WangJi could still tolerate him. Should he be congratulated because of his progress?!

After a while of staring at nothing, Wei WuXian turned around and went off the bed. He lightly moved to the other chamber.

Lan WangJi lay sideways on the bed, appearing to be already asleep. Without making a sound, Wei WuXian approached him.

He was still not giving up, hoping to fish the jade token for passage out of him. However, as he just extended his hand, Lan WangJi's long lashes fluttered, and he opened his eyes.

Wei WuXian quickly made up his mind. He threw himself onto the bed.

He remembered that Lan WangJi hated physical contact with other people. In the past, just with one touch and the offender would have been hurled out. If, even like this, he endured it, then the person was definitely not Lan WangJi. He would even doubt that Lan WangJi's body was taken!

Wei WuXian's entire body was above Lan WangJi's, with legs separated, kneeling with one on each side of his waist. His hands were against the , trapping Lan WangJi in between his arms. He gradually lowered his head. The distance between the two faces became closer and closer. Closer and closer. At the point where it became hard for Wei WuXian to breathe, Lan WangJi finally opened his mouth.

He stayed silent for a few moments, "Get off."

Wei WuXian , "No."

A pair of pale-colored eyes looked at Wei WuXian at a very close distance. Lan WangJi stared fixedly at him, and repeated, "... Get off."

Wei WuXian spoke, “No. If you allowed me to sleep here, you should have known that something like this would happen.”

Lan WangJi spoke, “Are you sure that this is what you want?”

“...” For some reason, Wei WuXian felt that he should carefully consider his reply.

As he was about to curl his lips into a smile, a numbness suddenly came from his waist, and his legs gave out. With a , he fell onto Lan WangJi’s body.

The curvature of a half-smile was frozen on his lips. His head was at the right side of Lan WangJi chest and he couldn’t move at all. Lan WangJi’s voice came from above him.

His voice was low and deep. His chest vibrated slightly as he spoke each word.

“Then stay like this for the whole night.”

Wei WuXian didn’t expect it to end up like this at all. He shifted around, wanting to get up, but his waist continued to ache and felt limp. He could only be attached to another man in such an awkward situation, feeling a bit befuddled.

Just what in the world happened to Lan Zhan in the past few years, turning him into a person like this?

Was this the same Lan Zhan as before?!

Shouldn’t he have been the person whose body was seized?!?!

Suddenly, as his thoughts were as jumbled as a hurricane, Lan WangJi slightly shifted. Wei WuXian’s spirits lifted, assuming that he finally couldn’t bear it any more. However, Lan WangJi simply waived his hand.

The lights went out.

Translator’s Notes

% : This is a very famous proverb in China. It tells the story of a man who buried his money under the ground, and added a sign that said something along the lines of “three-hundred taels are not buried here”. This is an example of someone conspicuously protecting his innocence and making a very poor lie.

: This is pronounced like " instead of . Do not mistake the with an , or else you will be confused.

* : In the past (and in traditional households in the present), beds are hard and made of wood.

% : As most of you probably know already, to lose face means to embarrass oneself. To thicken one's face, on the other hand, means to be not afraid of losing face, pretty much saying that one has too thick of a face to lose any layers.

Chapter 13 Refinement—Part Three

At a later time, Wei WuXian pondered upon the reason why his relationship with Lan WangJi wasn't good. Getting to the root of the matter, everything started when he was fifteen, coming to the GusuLan Sect with Jiang Cheng to study for three months.

There was a virtuous and prestigious elder in the GusuLan Sect—Lan QiRen. Everyone in the cultivation world accepted three characteristics which described him: pedantic, stubborn, and a strict teacher who produced outstanding students. Although the first two points kept a lot of people at a respective distance to him, some even to the point of secret dislike, the last one made them try everything they could to send their children to study under him. He had brought up quite a number of excellent disciples of the Lan Sect. As long as they stayed a few years in his classroom, no matter how pathetically useless they were when they first entered, they would at least seem to be decent when they depart, especially in terms of appearance and etiquette. There were plenty of parents who were so excited that tears flowed down their cheeks when they picked up their sons.

To this matter, Wei WuXian declared, "Do I not seem decent enough as of right now?"

Jiang Cheng replied with a great deal of foresight, "You'd definitely be a mark of shame in his entire teaching career."

In that year, aside from the YunmengJiang Sect, there were also the young masters from other clans, sent to study here from parents who heard of the reputation. The young masters were all around fifteen or sixteen. Because the sects all knew the others, although they weren't close, they had seen others' faces before. It was widely known that, although Wei WuXian's surname was not Jiang, he was the leading disciple of the sect leader of the YunmengJiang Sect—Jiang FengMian, and also the son of his friend who had passed away. In fact, the sect leader regarded him as his own child. This, along with how youths were not as concerned with status and ancestry as elders, they were soon friends. Only a few sentences passed, and everyone started to call others older brothers or younger brothers. Somebody asked, "The Lotus Pier of the Jiang Clan is much more fun than here, right?"

Wei WuXian laughed, "Fun or not fun depends on how fun you make it to be. There's definitely less rules than here, and no need to wake up so early."

The GusuLan Sect wakes as five in the morning and rests at nine in the evening, not allowing any delay. Somebody else asked, "When do you guys wake up? What do you do during the day?"

Jiang Cheng humphed, “Him? He wakes at nine in the morning and sleeps at one during the night. When he wakes up, he doesn’t practice his sword or meditate; he goes boating, swims around, picks lotus seedpods, and hunts for pheasants.”

Wei WuXian replied, “No matter how much pheasants I hunt, I’m still number one.”

One youth spoke, “Next year, I’m going to Yunmeng to study! Nobody can hold me back!”

, “Nobody would hold you back. Your older brother would just break your legs.”

The youth drooped at once. This was the second young master of the QingheNie Sect—Nie HuaiSang. His brother, Nie MingJue, was extremely resolute when carrying out orders, quite renowned in the cultivation world. Although the brothers were not born from the same mother, their relationship was quite solid. Nie MingJue had always taught his younger brother with extreme harshness, particularly caring for his studies. This was why, even though Nie HuaiSang respected his older brother, he was the most scared of Nie MingJue mentioning his schoolwork.

Wei WuXian spoke, “To be honest, Gusu is quite fun as well.”

Nie HuaiSang spoke, “* - , listen to a sincere advice of mine. The Cloud Recesses is nothing like Lotus Pier. On this trip to Gusu, remember that there’s one person whom you shouldn’t provoke.”

Wei WuXian asked, “Who? Lan QiRen?”

Nie HuaiSang replied, “Not that old man. The one you need to be careful of is his proudest disciple, named Lan Zhan.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “The Lan Zhan from the Two Jades of Lan? Lan WangJi?”

The respectable title of the Two Jades of Lan were given to the two sons of the GusuLan Sect’s current sect leader—Lan Huan and Lan Zhan. Just after they passed fourteen, they were deemed by the elders of each sect as exemplary models to compare with their own disciples. They were exceptionally famous among the juniors, so it was only natural that everyone recognized the names. Nie HuaiSang spoke, “What other Lan Zhan is there? Yes, it’s that one. Oh gosh, he’s the same age as you and I, but he has none of the energy of a teen. He’s stiff and strict, even worse than his uncle.”

Wei WuXian made the sound of an and asked, “Is he a lad who looks quite pretty?”

Jiang Cheng sneered, “Is there anyone who looks ugly in the GusuLan Sect? His sect doesn’t even accept disciples with unclean features. If you can, find me one who has an average face.”

Wei WuXian emphasized, “Very pretty.” He pointed at his head, “White from top to bottom, wearing a forehead ribbon, and carrying a silver sword on his back. He looked rather handsome, but with his straight face, he looked like he was mourning.”

“...” Nie HuaiSang spoke assuredly, “That’s him!” After a pause, he spoke again, “But he had been doing for the past few days. You just came yesterday; when did you have the chance to see him?

“Yesterday night”

“Yesterday… Yesterday night?!” Jiang Cheng was stunned, “There’s a curfew in the Cloud Recesses. Where did you see him? Why don’t I know about this?”

Wei WuXian pointed, “There.”

He pointed to a the top of a very tall wall.

The others were out of speech. Jiang Cheng even felt his head growing larger and clenched his teeth, “We just came and you got into trouble! What’s the matter about?”

Wei WuXian replied with a grin, “There really isn’t much. When we came, we passed that liquor shop called ‘Emperor’s Smile’, right? Yesterday at night, I was tossing and turning, and couldn’t stand it any longer, so I went down the mountain, into the city, and brought back two jars. Mind you, we don’t have the chance to drink this in Yunmeng.”

Jiang Cheng, “Then, where’s the liquor?”

Wei WuXian, “Well, when I just flipped over the top of the wall, before I even had one leg inside, I was caught by him.”

One youth remarked, “Wei-xiong, you must have struck gold. He probably just got out of seclusion and went on night patrol, and caught you red-handed.”

Jiang Cheng spoke, “Those who return at night won’t be let in before seven in the morning. How come he let you inside?”

Wei WuXian threw up his hands, “So, he didn’t let me in. He wanted me to move back the leg that had already stepped in. You tell me—how would I do that? And then, he came up, as light as a feather, and asked me what I had in my hands.”

Jiang Cheng felt his head start to ache, indicating a foreboding feeling, “What did you say?”

Wei WuXian spoke, “‘It’s Emperor’s Smile! If I share a jar with you, can you pretend that you never saw me?’”

Jiang Cheng sighed, “... Alcohol is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses. That’s a worse crime.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “He said the same thing to me. And I asked, ‘Why don’t you tell me what exactly is not forbidden in your sect?’ He seemed like he was a bit angry and wanted me to look at the Wall of Rules in front of the mountain. Honestly, there were over three thousand, and everything was written in . Who would read them? Did you read them? Anyways, I didn’t. What’s angering about this?”

“That’s right!” Everyone felt the same way, and all started to complain about the strange, outdated conventions in the Cloud Recesses, regretting that they didn’t meet sooner, “Whose sect rules are over three thousand in number, and don’t even repeat? Things like ‘killing livestock within the area is prohibited, fighting without permission is prohibited, promiscuity is prohibited, venturing at night is prohibited, causing noise is prohibited, running is prohibited’ are tolerable, but there’re even ones like ‘sneering for no reason is prohibited, sitting improperly is prohibited, eating more than three bowls is prohibited’...” Wei WuXian suddenly added, “What? Fighting without permission is also prohibited?”

Jiang Cheng, “... Yes. Don’t tell me you fought with him.”

Wei WuXian, “I did. And we broke a jar of Emperor’s Smile.”

Everyone and exclaimed in regret.

In any case, the situation couldn’t have been any worse, causing Jiang Cheng’s focus to switch, “Didn’t you bring back two jars? Where’s the other one?”

“I drank it.”

Jiang Cheng, “Where did you drink it?”

“In front of him. I said, ‘Okay, if alcohol is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses, then I won’t go in. I’ll drink it standing on the wall. That wouldn’t count as violating the rules, would it?’ Then I drank everything in one gulp, right in front of him.”

“... And then?”

“And then we started fighting.”

“Wei-xiong.” Nie HuaiSang blurted out, “You’re so smug.”

Wei WuXian lifted his brows, “Lan Zhan’s skills were quite good.”

“You’re gonna die, Wei-xiong! Lan Zhan had never been at such a loss before. He’s probably after you. You should be careful. Although Lan Zhan doesn’t go to classes with us, he’s in charge of punishments in the Lan Sect!”

Wei WuXian was not frightened at all, waving his hand, “What’s there to be scared of? Didn’t everyone say that Lan Zhan had been a prodigy since he was very young? If he’s so smart from such an early age, then he probably finished learning everything his uncle taught and do secluded meditation all the time. How would he have time to come after me? I…”

Before his sentence was finished, as the group walked around a wall with a hollowed out window, they saw a white-clothed boy sitting in a rigidly upright position in the room, with long hair tied up and wearing a forehead ribbon, emitting an aura of ice and frost. He swept a cold look at them.

At once, it was as if the ten-or-so mouths were silenced. They quietly entered the room, quietly picked their seats to sit, and quietly avoided the desks around Lan WangJi.

Jiang Cheng patted Wei WuXian’s shoulder and whispered, “He’s after you. Hope for the best.”

When Wei WuXian turned his head, he could see the side of Lan WangJi’s face. His lashes were long, appearing to be extremely delicate and elegant. His posture was also very upright, looking straight ahead. As he was just thinking about starting a conversation with him, Lan QiRen walked into the room.

Lan QiRen was tall and thin, standing with a straight back. Although he had a long, black goatee, he was definitely not old. And, according to the tradition of the GusuLan Sect producing beautiful men each generation, he was definitely not bad-looking either. Yet, unfortunately, with the pedantic and stiff air that surrounded him, nothing would feel wrong if one called him an old

man. He entered with a scroll in one hand. The long scroll of paper rolled all over the ground as soon as he opened it, and he started to talk about the rules of the Lan Sect. The faces of everyone in the room started to grow dark. As Wei WuXian was bored, his gaze flew everywhere, and landed on the side face of Lan WangJi. He was shocked as he saw concentration and seriousness that were nothing like a facade, “How can he listen so attentively to something so boring?”

Immediately, in the front, Lan QiRen slammed the scroll onto the ground and smiled bitterly, “I am only repeating this one by one because nobody reads it, even though it was carved onto the rock wall. Hence, nobody will be able to violate them using ignorance as an excuse again. Even if I do this, there are still people who do not pay attention. Very well, I will proceed to talk about something else.”

Although his words could be applied to everyone in the room, Wei WuXian’s intuition told him that it was a warning directed at him. As he expected, Lan QiRen spoke, “Wei Ying.”

Wei WuXian answered, “Here.”

“Let me ask you. Are yao, demons, ghosts, and monsters the same things?”

Wei WuXian smiled, “No.”

“Why not? How are they differentiated?”

“Yao are formed from living, non-human beings; demons are formed from living humans; ghosts are formed from dead humans; monsters are formed from dead, non-human beings.”

“‘Yao’ and ‘monsters’ are often confused. What is an example that distinguishes the two?”

“That’s easy.” Wei WuXian pointed at the viridian tree outside of the room and replied, “For example, a living tree was tainted with the energy of books, cultivated into a conscious being, and causes mischief, it would be a ‘yao’. If I took an axe and cut it in the middle, so that only a dead tree-stump was left, and then it cultivates into a being, it would be a ‘monster.’”

“What was the profession of the progenitor of the QinghеNie Sect?”

“A butcher.”

“The heraldry of the LanlingJin Sect is a white peony. Which type of white peony is it?”

“ .”

“Who was the first in the cultivation world to focus on the rise of his clan rather than his sect?”

“The progenitor of the QishanWen Sect, Wen Mao.”

His fluent answers made everyone’s hearts skip a few beats. Although they felt lucky, they all prayed for him to not be stumped by any questions, so that Lan QiRen wouldn’t have the opportunity to pick on other people. Yet, Lan QiRen spoke, “As a disciple of the YunmengJiang Sect, you should have been very familiar with these and known them by heart since long ago, so there is nothing to be proud of even if you answered correctly. Let me ask you again—there is an executioner with parents, a wife, and children, but before he died, he executed more than one hundred people. He suddenly died in the public and, to punish him for his deeds, he was left on the streets for seven days. With the repressed energy of resentment, he started to haunt and kill. What should be done?”

This time, Wei WuXian didn’t answer immediately. The others thought that he was confused, and were all feeling restless. Lan QiRen scolded, “Why are you looking at him? Think about this as well. Don’t open your books!”

The disciples took their hands away from the books that they intended on quickly flipping through. They were confused as well—having died in the public and left on the streets for seven days, it was definitely a fierce ghost and a ferocious corpse, and therefore a question hard to solve. Everyone hoped that the old man Lan wouldn’t pick on them to answer. After a few moments, seeing that Wei WuXian didn’t answer, Lan QiRen seemed like he was thinking, and spoke again, “WangJi, you can tell him what should be done.”

Translator’s Notes

: This should be interpreted figuratively instead of literally. It is a common saying to pour or throw a bucket of cold water onto someone, to imply that one’s words reduced another’s hopes for something.

* - : The 8 suffix means “older brother”. However, it doesn’t have to be the speaker’s actual older brother. It is usually used to indicate respect for someone older than you, as it was impolite to call the names of others (especially older than you) directly.

: In cultivation, it is common practice to do secluded meditation, or to meditate on your own for a long amount of time in a secluded space. The length of this time period depends on how skilled the cultivator is.

: This is simply a “font” or type of script which the ancient Chinese used during the Qin Dynasty. In the context of this novel, as it is not based on any specific dynasty or period of history, it implies that the seal script is hard to read and not commonly used by most people in the world.

: A common reaction that goes after a sudden realization or some other sort of emotion that requires a shout (or a sigh, in some cases) is to slap one’s legs.

: In fact, this is actually a real type of peony in China. The literal translation of this is - 2 92 # 2 " , but the name has been shortened for it to fit better within the translated version.

Chapter 14 Refinement—Part Four

Lan WangJi did not look at Wei WuXian. He nodded to indicate respect and spoke in a monotonous voice, “First, liberate; second, suppress; third, eliminate. The initial approach is to utilize the gratitude of his relatives and grant his dying wish, set free what he could not let go of. If it fails, suppress it. If the crimes were extremely wrongful, and its energy of resentment does not dissipate, exterminate it completely. The cultivation world should precisely keep to this order of measures. No errors should be allowed.”

Everyone let out a long breath, thanking the Heavens because Lan WangJi was the one the old man selected. Else, if it was their turn, it would be hard to not overlook a few steps or mix up the order. Lan QiRen nodded with satisfaction, “Not a single mistake was made.” With a pause, he spoke again, “No matter in terms of cultivation or as a person, one needs to be as solid as this. If one becomes complacent and proud just because they defeated a few simple mountain beings in their home and hold some empty reputations, one would definitely bring disgrace upon themselves, sooner or later.”

Wei WuXian raised his brows and took a look at the side of Lan WangJi’s face. He thought,

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He spoke, “I have a question.”

Lan QiRen replied, “Speak.”

Wei WuXian, “Although ‘liberation’ comes first, it is often impossible. ‘To grant his dying wish’ sounds simple—it would be easy, if the wish was a new piece of clothing, but what if the wish was to kill lots of people for revenge?”

Lan WangJi, “Thus, suppression assists liberation. If it is necessary, elimination would also follow.”

Wei WuXian smiled, “Such a waste.” He paused, and continued, “It wasn’t that I didn’t know of this answer, I was only thinking of a fourth path.”

Lan QiRen spoke, “I have never heard of any fourth paths.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “Because the executioner died in such a way, it is only natural that he turned into a ferocious corpse. Since he executed more than one hundred people before he died,

why not dig up the graves of these people, arouse their energy of resentment, collect the heads of those hundred people, and use them to fight with the ferocious corpse…"

Lan WangJi finally turned around to look at him. His brows were knit, still expressionless. Lan QiRen was so angered that his goatee was quivering. He shouted, "How dare you!"

Everyone in the room was stunned. Lan QiRen sprang to his feet, "The essence of exorcising demons and annihilating ghosts is to liberate! You do not study the methods of liberation, and even think about increasing their energy of resentment! You reverse the natural order, and ignore ethics and morality!"

Wei WuXian replied, "There are some things that have no use after liberation, so why not find a way to make use of them? When + ! tamed the flood, obstruction was the inferior method, and redirection was the superior. Suppression is the same as obstruction, so isn't it inferior…" Lan QiRen hurled a book toward him, but he flinched to the side and avoided it. His expression remained unchanged, and continued to talk nonsense, "Spiritual energy is energy; resentful energy is energy as well. Spiritual energy is stored in the . It can split mountains and fill oceans, available for human use. If so, then why can't resentful energy also be used by humans?"

Another book came flying from Lan QiRen. He spoke harshly, "Then, let me ask you again! How do you make sure that the resentful energy only listens to you and does not harm others?"

Wei WuXian ducked while speaking, "I haven't thought of it yet!"

Lan QiRen raged, "If you thought of it, the cultivation world would not allow your existence! Get out!"

Wei WuXian couldn't be more glad, and quickly went out.

He wandered about the Cloud Recesses for the morning, picking flowers and playing with grasses. After everyone finished the lesson, they finally found him on the roof of a tall wall. Wei WuXian was sitting on the grey tiles of the ledge, holding a piece of grass in his mouth. His right hand was under his cheek, and sat with one leg propped up and the other hanging down, swaying slightly. The disciples down there pointed at him, "Wei-xiong! How admirable of you! He told you to get out, and you really went outside! Hahahaha…"

"After you went out, a long while passed before he finally understood what happened. His face was so purple!"

Wei WuXian chewed on the grass and shouted toward below him, “He asks, and I answer. If he tells me to get out, I will get out. What else does he want me to do?”

Nie HuaiSang spoke, “Why does it seem like old man Lan is especially strict towards you? He always directs his scoldings at you.”

Jiang Cheng humphed, “It serves him right. What sort of answer is that? It’s fine if he spouts these nonsense at home, but he dared to say these in front of Lan QiRen. He’s seeking his own death!”

Wei WuXian spoke, “No matter how I answered it, he wouldn’t like me, so I might as well just say what I wanted to say. Anyways, I didn’t try to offend him. I was just answering properly.”

After thinking for a few moments, an expression of envy and yearning appeared on Nie HuaiSang’s face, “To be honest, Wei-xiong’s words were quite interesting. Spiritual energy can only be obtained through cultivation and taking great pains to form a golden core. It would take I-don’t-know-how-many years to do, especially for someone like me, whose talent seems as if it was gnawed by a dog when I was in my mother’s womb. But, resentful energy are from the fierce ghosts. If they can easily be taken and used, it would be beyond wonderful.”

A golden core was a core formed by cultivators after they had cultivated to a certain point. It can store and control spiritual energy. After the core was formed, the cultivator’s level of cultivation would increase at a rapid speed, and become better and better. Else, they would only be a low-end cultivator. If disciple from a prominent clan forms the core at a later age, it would be a disgrace to tell other people of it, yet Nie HuaiSang didn’t feel ashamed at all. Wei WuXian also laughed, “I know, right? No harm comes from using it.”

Jiang Cheng warned, “That’s enough. It’s fine if you talk about it, but don’t actually walk such a crooked path.”

Wei WuXian smiled, “Why would I leave the nice, broad road, and walk on a single-plank bridge on a dark, narrow river instead? If it really is that easy, people would have already walked on it. Don’t worry, he was just asking, and I was just answering. Hey, are you guys coming?
Since it’s not curfew yet, hunt for pheasants with me.”

Jiang Cheng scolded, “What do you mean ‘hunt for pheasants’? Why would there be pheasants here?! First, go copy ： . Lan QiRen asked me to tell you to copy the ; section of ： for three times, so that you can learn what natural law and morality is.”

: was the collection of the Lan Sect's sect rules. The sect rules here was too long, so Lan QiRen revised them into a thick collection. The sections ; and & were four fifth of the whole book. Wei WuXian spat out the grass which he held in his mouth and dusted his boots, "Three times? I'd ' if I just copied them once. I'm not from the Lan Sect, and don't intend to marry into the Lan Clan, so why should I copy the sect rules of his sect? I'm not gonna copy."

Nie HuaiSang quickly spoke, "I'll copy for you! I'll copy for you!"

Wei WuXian, "No good person does favours for others out of the blue. Tell me, what do you want me to do?"

Nie Huai Sang replied, "It's like this. Wei-xiong, old man Lan has a bad habit. He…"

In the middle of his sentence, he suddenly paused and coughed drily, opening up his fan and shifting to the side. Wei WuXian knew that something was wrong. He turned around and, sure enough, Lan WangJi stood under an ancient, verdant tree and gazed in their direction, carrying the Bichen sword on his back. He looked like a jade tree, reflecting the mottled shadows of leaves and sunlight. However, his stare wasn't kind at all, as if it could lock them in a cavern made of ice. Everyone knew that their shouts were a bit too loud, and the noise had probably led him over, so they all shut their mouths. Yet, Wei WuXian jumped down and gravitated toward him, "WangJi-xiong!"

Lan WangJi turned around and immediately walked away. Wei WuXian cheerfully went after him and yelled, "WangJi-xiong, wait for me!"

The white clothed figure flashed behind the tree, and suddenly disappeared without a trace, clearly showing that Lan WangJi didn't want to converse with him. Having received only a view from behind, Wei WuXian turned around and complained to the others, "He ignored me."

"Yeah," Nie HuaiSang spoke, "It looks like he really hates you, Wei-xiong. Lan WangJi usually… No, he never does something so impolite."

Wei WuXian, "He hates me already? I wanted to apologize to him."

Jiang Cheng sneered, "Apologizing now? Too late! Like his uncle, he surely thinks that you are evil and unruly to the core, and didn't bother to pay you any attention."

Wei WuXian thought otherwise. He chuckled, “Who cares if he ignored me? Does he look pretty?” After a thought, he realized that Lan WangJi did look pretty. And so, he happily threw away his desire to twitch his lips.

Only after three days, did Wei WuXian finally know of Lan QiRen’s bad habit.

Lan QiRen’s lessons were not only tediously long, but everything was also tested on. The generational changes of important clans in the cultivation world, the division of their areas of power, famous quotes by famous cultivators, family trees…

Although he didn’t understand a single bit as he listened in class, Nie HuaiSang worked as hard as a slave when the date of the test approached. He copied ; two times for Wei WuXian, and begged before the test, “Please, Wei-xiong, if my grade is lower than , my brother would really break my legs! Stuff like telling apart direct lineage, collateral lineage, main clan, clan branches… For us disciples from big clans, we can’t even distinguish our relationships with our own relatives, randomly calling everyone who are more than away from us aunts and uncles. Does anyone have enough capacity in their brain to remember those of other clans?!”

As a result of cheating notes flying everywhere in the air, Lan WangJi suddenly attacked during the test, and caught a few initiators of the commotion. Lan QiRen exploded with anger, writing letters to the prominent clans to tell on them. He loathed Wei WuXian—in the beginning, although these disciples could hardly sit still, at least nobody started anything, and their buttocks were able to stick to their legs. However, now that Wei Ying came, the originally spineless brats were influenced by his encouragement, venturing out at night and drinking alcohol however they pleased. The unhealthy practices grew greater and greater. As he had expected, Wei Ying was one of the biggest threats to humanity!

Jiang FengMian replied, “Ying has always been like this. Please take care to discipline him, Mr. Lan.”

And so, Wei WuXian was punished again.

At first, he didn’t think too much of it. It was only copying texts, and he never lacked people who copied for him. Yet, this time, Nie HuaiSang spoke, “Wei-xiong, even if I want to help you, I can’t any more. You’d have to endure it on your own.”

Wei WuXian asked, “What happened?”

Nie HuaiSang, “Old… Mr. Lan said that you have to copy both ; and & .”

& was the most complicated section of the twelve sections in the Lan Sect's sect rules. It cited a lot of classics, was terribly long, and had a lot of rarely-used characters. Copy it one time, and one would lose all interest in life. Copy it ten times, and one would fly to Heaven on the spot. Nie HuaiSang added, "He also said that, during the time of the punishment, nobody is allowed to fool around with you or copy them for you."

Wei WuXian wondered, "How would he know if someone copied them for me or not? Surely it doesn't mean that he's making someone watch me."

Jiang Cheng spoke, "That's exactly the case."

"..." Wei WuXian spoke, "What did you say?"

Jiang Cheng, "He told you that you're not allowed to go outside and have to go to the Library Pavilion to copy, and also face the wall and reflect upon your mistakes. Of course, there will be someone to watch you. I don't need to tell you who he is, do I?"

Inside the Library Pavilion—

There was one bamboo , one wooden desk, two candlesticks, and two people. One sat in a proper position, but, on the other side, Wei WuXian had already copied & for more than ten pages. His head felt dizzy and his heart felt bored, so he dropped his to take a breath and looked across.

When he was still in Yunmeng, there were a lot of girls who envied that he could come and study with Lan WangJi. They said that each generation was full of nice-looking men, especially the brothers part of the Two Jades in the current generation. Before this, Wei WuXian never had the chance to carefully examine the front of his face. Now that he had a look at it, he started to think random thoughts, , ! "
" % "
"

Lan WangJi was recopying ancient books, which were not only old but also unavailable to most others, in the Lan Sect's Library Pavilion. His brushstrokes were slow and steady, and his handwriting was neat yet sharply vigourous. Wei WuXian couldn't help but to compliment him sincerely, "Those are some great characters! They're of the top level."

Lan WangJi remained indifferent.

Wei WuXian rarely kept his mouth shut for such a long amount of time. Feeling suffocated, he thought,

At this point of thought, he couldn't help but slightly tilted his body forward.

Translator's Notes

+ ! : This was a famous person in the history of China. He was known for introducing a method of controlling and stopping the floods from destroying villages.

: This refers to the region in the body where a person's Qi, or energy, is concentrated. It is located three finger widths below and two finger widths behind the navel, where girls' period cramps happen (not really, but you get the idea). The definition comes from https://immortalmountain.wordpress.com/glossary/wuxia-xianxia-xuanhuan-terms/#world.

2 ' : This is what happens when a cultivator is of such a high level that they finally become an Immortal and fly up to Heaven. This usually happens in high fantasy, but GDC is low fantasy, so nobody actually flies up to Heaven. If you're interested in settings involving gods and Immortals, check out the author's new work—, / . No group is translating this yet, but the fanart is quite nice.

+ : There are four grades—jia, yi, bing, and ding. Yi is the second level, so it is pretty much a B in terms of the American grading system.

% : This means that there are two levels of relationship between them, such as the cousin of a cousin and so on.

: Seats in Ancient China were made of bamboo weaved together into a flat piece of mat on the ground to sit on.

Chapter 15 Refinement—Part Five

Wei WuXian was someone who was skilled at finding fun for himself, especially talented in the area of seeking joy amid dull circumstances. Since there wasn't anything else to play with, he could only play with Lan WangJi. He called, "WangJi-xiong."

Lan WangJi remained motionless.

Wei WuXian, "WangJi."

He appeared as if he didn't hear anything.

Wei WuXian, "Lan WangJi."

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan!"

Lan WangJi finally stopped writing, and looked up at him with a cold gaze. Wei WuXian shifted backward, raising his hands as if he was defending himself, "Don't look at me like this. I only called your name because you didn't answer when I called you WangJi. If you're upset, you can also call me back with my name."

Lan WangJi spoke, "Put your legs down."

Wei WuXian's sitting posture was extremely improper, with a slanted body and legs propped up. Seeing that he finally teased Lan WangJi to the point that he started to talk, the former silently chuckled to himself, as if he finally saw the clouds disperse and the moon appear[1]. Listening to Lan WangJi's words, he put his legs down, but his upper body inched unnoticeably closer, and he pressed his arms onto the desk. It was still an unacceptable sitting posture. He asked in a serious tone, "Lan Zhan. Let me ask you a question. Do you… really hate me that much?"

Lan WangJi looked down, his lashes casting light shadows onto his jade-like cheeks. Wei WuXian hurriedly added, "Hey, don't be like this, ignoring me again after saying so few words. I want to admit my fault and apologize to you. Look at me."

After a pause, he spoke again, "You don't want to look at me? Sure, then. I'll just start talking. It was my fault during that night. I was wrong. I shouldn't have climbed the wall, I shouldn't have drank alcohol, and I shouldn't have fought with you. But, I swear! It wasn't that I provoked you on purpose—I really didn't look at the sect rules. The sect rules in the Jiang Sect are all told verbally; none of them are written down. Or else, I definitely wouldn't have done that."

" 1 < 2 "

" "
"

Wei WuXian continued, “And, let’s be reasonable—which of us attacked first? It was you. If you didn’t attack, we could’ve communicated nicely and cleared everything up. However, if someone hits me, I’d have to hit them back. This isn’t all my fault. Lan Zhan, are you listening? Look at me. Young Master Lan?” He snapped his fingers, “Second Brother Lan[2], why don’t you do me a favor and look at me?”

Lan WangJi didn’t even lift his eyes, “Copy it one additional time.”

Wei WuXian’s body immediately slanted, “Don’t be like this. It’s my fault, alright?”

Lan WangJi exposed his lie mercilessly, “You do not feel any remorse.”

Wei WuXian spoke as if he didn’t have any dignity, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I can repeat it however many times you want me to. I can even say it while kneeling down.”

Lan WangJi put his brush down. Wei WuXian thought that the other couldn’t endure it any longer and finally wanted to beat him up. Just as he got ready to put on a goofy grin, he discovered that his upper and lower lips seemed like they were glued together, so he couldn’t laugh.

His face quickly changed. He struggled to talk, “ ? !”

Lan WangJi closed his eyes and let out a faint breath of air. When he opened his eyes, the calm expression returned again. He picked up the brush again, as if nothing had happened. Wei WuXian had been aware of the hated silencing spell of the Lan Sect since long ago, and he refused to believe it. Yet, after making every effort, scratching the corners of his lips red, he still couldn’t open his mouth no matter what. And so, he grabbed a piece of paper, wrote as if his brush was flying, and threw the paper over. Lan WangJi glanced at it. “Pathetic,” he responded, crumpling it into a ball and tossing it away.

Wei WuXian was so angry that he rolled around on the mat, climbed up, and wrote another one, slamming it in front of Lan WangJi. Again, it was crumpled into a ball and tossed away.

The silencing spell was only removed after he finished copying. The second day, when he came to the Library Pavilion again, the balls of paper which landed everywhere were all taken out.

Wei WuXian had always forgot about the pain after the cut healed[3]. Although, on the first day, he suffered greatly from the silencing spell, after a few moments, his mouth started to itch again. After recklessly speaking a few times, he was silenced once more. He couldn't open his mouth, so he scribbled on paper and pushed them to Lan WangJi, who crumpled it and threw it onto the ground. The same thing happened on the third day.

He was silenced time after time. However, on the last day of him having to "face the wall and reflect," Lan WangJi noticed that Wei WuXian seemed somewhat different.

During his stay at Gusu, he left his sword all around the place, and was never seen carrying it properly. Yet, he took it with him today, loudly slamming it onto the desk. He even went as far as to start writing without a word, contrasting his usual behavior of relentlessly harassing Lan WangJi in every way possible. He was so obedient that it was strange.

Lan WangJi didn't have a reason to silence him, so he took a few more glances at him, as if he didn't believe that Wei WuXian was finally willing to behave himself. As he had expected, after a short while of sitting down, Wei WuXian repeated his past conduct again, giving Lan WangJi a piece of paper for him to see.

Lan WangJi originally thought that it was going to be a mess of lame phrases again, but after a coincidental glimpse, he was surprised to find the drawing of a person, sitting upright and reading by the window, with a vividly realistic expression on his face. It was himself.

Seeing that he didn't avert his gaze at once, Wei WuXian curled his lips, and raised his eyebrow with a wink. No words were needed, since the meaning was plain to see—=

Lan WangJi slowly spoke, "You have spare time, yet you scribble instead of copy the text. In my opinion, the day of your release from this punishment will never come."

Wei WuXian blew on the ink which hadn't dried yet and spoke nonchalantly, "I already finished copying, so I won't be coming tomorrow!"

Lan WangJi's slender fingers seemed to have paused before flipping over the next yellow-tinted page. Surprisingly, Wei WuXian wasn't silenced. As he didn't provoke any reaction, Wei WuXian lightly threw the drawing, "It's yours."

The drawing was thrown onto the mat, but Lan WangJi didn't have any intention of picking it up. During these days, the paper which Wei WuXian wrote on to curse him, cajole him,

apologize to him, beg him, and other messy scribbles all ended up this way. He was used to it and didn't mind. He suddenly added, "I forgot. I need to add something else."

After his words, he picked up the paper and his brush, and added a few strokes. He glanced at the drawing, then, the actual person, and fell toward the ground in laughter. Lan WangJi put down the book, and saw that Wei WuXian added a flower onto the drawing, where the side of his head was.

The corners of his lip seemed to have twitched. Wei WuXian crawled up and spoke before him, "'Pathetic', right? I just know that you're gonna say pathetic. Can't you switch to something else? Or add another word to it?"

Lan WangJi replied coldly, "Extremely pathetic."

Wei WuXian clapped his hands, "So you really added another word to it. Thank you!"

Lan WangJi turned his gaze away, picked up the book which he put on the desk, and opened it again. He only took one look at before he hurled the book away, as if he was burnt by fire.

He was initially reading a Buddhist text, but when he had looked at the page flipped open, he was presented with naked, intertwining figures, intolerable to his eye. The book that he was reading was substituted with a pornographic book, its cover disguised as a Buddhist text.

Even someone without a brain would have guessed who had done the deed. It must have been done when when took the opportunity that opened up when his attention turned to the drawing, let alone the fact that Wei WuXian didn't even bother to cover it up, slapping the table as he laughed hysterically, "Hahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

As the book was thrown on the ground, Lan WangJi seemed as if he was escaping from snakes or scorpions, falling back to the corner of the Library Pavilion in less than a second. He roared with rage, "Wei Ying——!"

Wei WuXian almost rolled under the desk from laughter, raising a hand with much difficulty, "Here! I'm here!"

Lan WangJi swiftly drew his sword, Bichen. Ever since they had met, Wei WuXian had never seen him appear so discomposed. He hastily grabbed his own sword. Drawing his sword so that a third of the blade was out, he reminded Lan WangJi, "Manners! Second Young Master Lan! Watch your manners! I brought my sword today as well. If we start fighting, would your Library Pavilion be fine?" He knew that Lan WangJi would be shamed into anger, so he went out of his

way to carry his sword for self-defence, so that he wouldn't be accidentally stabbed to death. The blade of Lan WangJi's sword pointed at him. Fire could almost be seen sprouting from his pair of light-colored eyes, "What sort of person are you?!"

Wei WuXian responded, "What sort of person could I be? A man!"

Lan WangJi lashed out "You have no shame!"

Wei WuXian, "Do I need to be ashamed about this? Don't tell me you've never seen something like this before. I don't believe you."

Lan WangJi's weak point was that he didn't know how to argue. After a moment of silently holding back, he pointed his sword at Wei WuXian. He spoke with a frigid face, "You, go outside. We have fought before."

Wei WuXian shook his head a couple of times, pretending to be docile, "Nope, nope. Didn't you know, Young Master Lan? Fighting without permission is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses." He proceeded to pick up the book which was thrown away, but Lan WangJi went before him, snatching it in his hand. Wei WuXian quickly guessed that he was going to use this as evidence to report him. He deliberately spoke, "Why are you grabbing it? I thought that you didn't want to read it. Now you do? Actually, even if you want to read it, you don't have to fight for it. I borrowed it exclusively for you, anyways. Now that you've seen my porn, you've become my friend. We can continue to exchange opinions, and…"

Lan WangJi's whole face turned white. He spoke one word at a time, "I. Will. Not. Read. It."

Wei WuXian continued to distort the facts, "If you won't read it, why did you grab it? Secretly keeping it? You can't do that. I borrowed this from someone else, so I'd have to return it after you read it… Hey, hey, hey, don't come here. You're too close; I feel nervous. Let's talk nicely. You're not gonna hand this in, are you? Hand it in to whom? Old… Your uncle? Second Young Master Lan, do you think that you can let the elders see this? He'd definitely think that you already read it. With a face as thin as yours, you'd be so ashamed that you'd die..."

Lan WangJi filled his right hand with spiritual energy, and the book broke into thousands of millions of pieces, fluttering downward. As Wei WuXian saw that he successfully provoked Lan WangJi to the point that the evidence was destroyed, he finally felt relieved, and spoke with fake regret, "What a waste!" Then, he picked up a piece of paper which had fallen on his hair, raising it up to show the fuming, pale-faced Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan, everything about you is great, except that you like to throw things everywhere. Tell me, how many wads of paper have you thrown onto the ground, in these past few days? Today, you aren't even satisfied with throwing

paper wads anymore, and instead ripped paper. You ripped it, so you clean it up yourself. I'm not gonna help." Of course, he had never helped anyway.

Lan WangJi tried again and again to put up with him, but he couldn't do it any more. He thundered, "Get lost!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "Well, well, look at you, Lan Zhan. Everyone says that you're a gentleman of excellence, a bright pearl in the world, carrying yourself with incomparable courtesy, so it seems that this is all there is. Didn't you know that causing noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses? And, you actually told me to "get lost." Is this the first time that you used this phrase on somebody…" Lan WangJi drew his sword and went at him. Wei WuXian hurriedly hopped onto the windowsill, "Get lost it is, then. Getting lost is my best skill. It's not necessary for you to see me out!"

He jumped down the Library Pavilion, laughing like a maniac as he barged into the forest. There was already a group of people waiting for him. Nie HuaiSang asked, "How did it go? Did he read it? What was he like?"

Wei WuXian replied, "What was he like? Ha! Didn't you guys hear that loud shout he gave?"

Nie HuaiSang was full of admiration, "I heard it—he told you to get lost! Wei-xiong, it was my first time hearing Lan WangJi tell someone to 'get lost'! How did you do it?"

Satisfaction was plastered all over Wei WuXian's face, "Good thing that I helped him achieve this 'first'. You all saw it, didn't you? The self-restraint and etiquette that Second Young Master Lan was praised so strongly for were all weak and useless against me."

Jiang Cheng scolded with a darkened expression, "What are you proud of?! What is there to be proud of with this?! Do you think that it's a glorious thing to be told by someone to get lost? You bring so much shame upon our sect!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "I really wanted to apologize to him, but he never paid attention to me. He silenced me for so many days, so what's wrong with me having a little fun with him? I presented him the book with a nice intention. HuaiSang-xiong, what happened to your treasured porn was really a pity. I didn't even get to finish it; it was so good! Lan Zhan definitely doesn't understand proper relationships. I gave it to him, yet he was still unhappy. It's such a waste of that face of his."

Nie HuaiSang blurted, "It's not a pity at all! You can have as many as you want."

Jiang Cheng sneered, “You’ve seriously offended both Lan WangJi and Lan QiRen. Just wait for your death tomorrow! Nobody’s gonna bury your corpse.”

Wei WuXian waved his hands, putting his arm around Jiang Cheng’s shoulders, “Who cares, as long as I tease him first? You’ve already buried my corpse so many times, so what’s wrong with once more?”

Jiang Cheng responded with a kick, “Shoo, shoo, shoo! Next time, if you do such a thing, don’t let me know! Don’t ask me to watch, either!”

Translator’s Notes

1. To see the clouds disperse and the moon appear means to finally see results after being patient and waiting for a long time.
2. The nickname “Second Brother Lan” will appear quite a lot of times in the future. The literal translation is “Second Older Brother Lan”, and is meant to be said in a jokingly way. In China, calling someone an older brother, especially for girls towards guys, is usually meant to be flirtatious. The word meaning “older brother” in Chinese is , and people (specifically readers of Heavenly Blessings) often describe it as having a soft, dough-like undertone to it, sounding like a little girl as one speaks. The end of the phrase swishes upwards, as if it’s a smooth, flowing ribbon tugging at one’s heartstrings. In simpler terms, this sounds like in Korean or ' in Japanese.
3. To forget about the pain after the cut heals means that one quickly forgets about the things they should’ve learnt from a punishment.

Chapter 16 Refinement—Part Six

In order to defend himself if ol' fuddy-duddy and lil' fuddy-duddy came to drag him out of his bed in the middle of the night, Wei WuXian slept while clinging on to his sword. Yet, the night went smoothly. On the second day, Nie HuaiSang came to him with an overjoyed expression, "Wei-xiong, you really struck it lucky. The old man went to our sect's Discussion Conference last night, so we don't have classes for a few days!"

5 " $ Wei WuXian quickly climbed up, beaming as he put on his boots, "A lucky strike, indeed, almost as if Heaven is blessing me with its clouds."

Jiang Cheng stood on the side, carefully cleaning his sword, and threw cold water on this notion, "When he comes back, you're still gonna get your punishment."

Wei WuXian responded, "Why would a living person worry about what happens after they die? I'll just live freely as long as possible. Let's go. I refuse to believe that I can't find any pheasants on this mountain of the Lan Sect."

The three walked together, passing through the reception room of the Cloud Recesses. Suddenly, Wei WuXian stopped in his tracks and exclaimed, "There are two lil' fuddy… Lan Zhan-s!"

A few people walked out of the room. Of the two youths at the front, both looked as if they were carved out of ice and jade, both wore the same snow-white robes, and both had sword tassels which swayed in the breeze, alongside ribbons on their clothes. The only differences were their ambiences and facial expressions. Wei WuXian could tell at once that, if the one with a stern face was Lan WangJi, the gentle one must be the other Jade of the Lan Sect—ZeWu-Jun, Lan XiChen.

As Lan WangJi saw Wei WuXian, he scrunched his brows, giving him a glare in an almost "glowering" fashion. As if he would be tainted if he looked a moment longer, he moved his gaze away and stared into the distance. On the other hand, Lan XiChen smiled, "And you are…?"

Jiang Cheng showed his respect with a salute, "Jiang WanYin of Yunmeng."

Wei WuXian followed, "Wei WuXian of Yunmeng."

Lan XiChen returned the salute. Nie HuaiSang whispered in the volume of a gnat, "Brother XiChen."

Lan XiChen turned to him, “HuaiSang, a while ago, as I returned from Qinghe, your brother asked of your studies. How is it? This year, will you be able to pass?”

Nie HuaiSang replied, “Generally speaking, yes…” He seemed like a wilted cucumber, looking at Wei WuXian in a helpless way. Wei WuXian grinned, “ZeWu-Jun, what are you two going out for?”

Lan XiChen, “To exterminate a water ghoul. We were short of hands, so I came back to find WangJi.”

Lan WangJi spoke coldly, “Brother, we do not need to engage in small talk. This matter permits no delay; it is time for us to depart.”

Wei WuXian hurried, “Wait, wait, wait. I know how to catch water ghouls. ZeWu-Jun, why don’t you take us along?”

Lan XiChen smiled without words. Lan WangJi declared, “It is against the rules.”

Wei WuXian, “How is it against the rules? We used to catch water ghouls all the time in Yunmeng. Besides, we don’t have classes these days anyways.”

Yunmeng was abundant in lakes and water, so it teemed with water ghouls. It was true that people of the Jiang Sect were adept at this, and Jiang Cheng also wanted to make up for the face which the YunmengJiang Sect lost during this stay at the Lan Sect, “That’s right. ZeWu-Jun, we’d definitely be of help.”

“It is not necessary. The GusuLan Sect is also…” Before Lan WangJi finished talking, Lan XiChen spoke while smiling, “Sure, then. Many thanks for your help. Do some preparations, and we can depart together. HuaiSang, are you coming as well?”

Nie HuaiSang also wanted to join in, but he had been reminded of his older brother as he met Lan XiChen. Cringing silently, he didn’t dare to have fun, “I’ll pass and go back so that I can review…” With this act, he hoped that Lan XiChen would put in some good words for him to his brother. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng went back to their rooms to prepare.

Lan WangJi looked at them from behind, his brows knitted with confusion, “Brother, why did you decide to bring them? Exterminating ghouls is not suited for joking around.”

Lan XiChen answered, “The head disciple and only son of Sect Leader Jiang are quite well-known in Yunmeng. It is likely that they know more than joking around.”

Although Lan WangJi didn't express his opinion, the phrase "I beg to differ" was written all over his face.

Lan XiChen spoke again, "And, also, you wish for him to go as well, do you not?"

Lan WangJi was stunned.

Lan XiChen, "I only agreed because you looked as if you wanted the head disciple of Sect Leader Jiang to come with you."

A silence fell upon them, as if the air was frozen solid.

Only after a while did Lan WangJi finally respond, speaking with great difficulty, "There was no such thing."

He wanted to defend himself further, but Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng already grabbed their swords and headed over, so Lan WangJi had to shut his mouth. The group mounted their swords[1] and set off.

The place where the water ghouls haunted was named Caiyi Town, about ten kilometers away from the Cloud Recesses.

Caiyi Town was connected with paths of water. It was either a net of rivers densely covering the town, or dwellings packed on either sides of the web-like water paths. The houses had white walls and grey roofs, and the rivers were filled with boats of baskets and people. On the banks, they sold flowers, fruits, bamboo crafts, pastries, tea, and silk.

Gusu was in the Jiangnan area, and all the voices one could hear were soft and gentle. As two boats crashed into each other, and a few jars of rice wine were spilled, even the arguments of the two boatmen sounded like chirps of the oriole. Although Yunmeng had many lakes, there weren't a lot of small towns with so much water. Wei WuXian found it quite interesting. He bought two jars of rice wine and gave one to Jiang Cheng, "Gusu people talk in such a sugary way. How is this arguing? If they see how Yunmeng people argue, they might be scared to death… Why are you looking at me, Lan Zhan? It's not that I'm too stingy to buy you any— aren't people from your sect prohibited from drinking alcohol?"

Having only stayed for a short time, the group boarded ten-or-so narrow boats, and rowed toward where the water ghouls gathered. Gradually, the number of houses on the banks decreased, and

the river path became quieter as well. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng each had a boat, competing who could row faster while listening to events in the area that concerned water ghouls.

This water path led to a large lake ahead of them, named Biling Lake. Caiyi Town hadn't been haunted by water ghouls ever since tens of years ago, yet, for the past few months, people had started to fall into this path and Biling Lake. Boats which carried goods also sunk without any reasons. A few days ago, Lan XiChen casted a few nets over this area. He expected to catch one or two water ghouls, but got about a dozen instead. He cleaned the corpses and carried them to a nearby part of the town, only to find that some corpses were not familiar to any of the local people, and remained unclaimed. Yesterday, he set up the net formation again, and caught quite a few again.

Wei WuXian spoke, "It doesn't seem like that the corpses drowned somewhere else and floated here either. Water ghouls are picky about their area. Most of the time, the only place they settle on is the place they drowned at, and they usually don't leave there."

Lan XiChen nodded, "That is correct. This was why I thought that it was no trivial matter, and asked WangJi to come along, in case something happens."

Wei WuXian asked, "ZeWu-Jun, water ghouls are really clever. If we use the boats and take our time like this, isn't it possible that they'll hide underwater and not come out? Won't we have to keep on searching forever? What if we can't find them?"

Lan WangJi replied, "We will wait until we find them. After all, we do what we must."

Wei WuXian, "Just by using nets?"

Lan XiChen, "That is right. Does the YunmengJiang Sect have other methods?"

Wei WuXian smiled but didn't respond. Of course, the YunmengJiang Sect used nets as well. But, because he was a good swimmer, he had always jumped into the river and dragged water ghouls out. However, this method was too dangerous; he definitely couldn't do it in front of the Lan Sect's people. If it travelled into Lan QiRen's ears, he would definitely face another lecture. He switched the topic, "It'd be great if there's something that can attract the water ghouls like a fishing bait. Or something that can point out their directions, like a compass."

Jiang Cheng spoke, "Look down at the water and concentrate on finding them. You're letting your imagination run again."

Wei WuXian, "Cultivation and riding on swords also used to be just imagination!"

As he looked down, he happened to be able to see the bottom of the boat which Lan WangJi was on. An idea flashed across his head, and he shouted, “Lan Zhan, look at me!”

At the moment, Lan WangJi was keeping a sharp lookout. As he heard the words, he looked up, only to see Wei WuXian’s bamboo paddle sweep up a splash of water and strike it toward him. With a tap of his foot, Lan WangJi lightly hopped onto another boat, dodging the spray. He was quite angered, thinking to himself that, sure enough, Wei WuXian was here to fool around, “Pathetic!”

However, Wei WuXian kicked the side of the boat which he was standing on, and tipped it over using the bamboo paddle. On the bottom of the boat, there were three water ghouls with swelling faces and ashen skin, tightly clinging onto the wooden boards!

A disciple who stood nearby immediately suppressed the three. Lan XiChen smiled, “Young Master Wei, how did you know that they were below the boats?”

Wei WuXian knocked on the side of the boat, “Simple! The displacement of water was wrong. He was the only person who stood on the boat, yet the displacement was greater than those of boats that carried two people. There must have been something on the bottom.”

Lan XiChen praised him, “You are experienced indeed.”

Wei WuXian’s paddle lightly glided through the water, and the boat’s speed quickened, so that he was right next to Lan WangJi’s boat. He spoke, “Lan Zhan, I didn’t splash water on you on purpose. Water ghouls are really clever. If I said it out loud, they would’ve heard it and got away. Hey, don’t ignore me. Why don’t you look at me, Second Young Master Lan?”

Lan WangJi finally condescended and gave him a glance, “Why did you come?”

Wei WuXian spoke with sincerity, “I’m here to apologize to you. Last night was my fault. I was wrong.”

Lan WangJi’s countenance was slightly dark, most likely because he still didn’t forget how Wei WuXian “apologized” to him. Wei WuXian asked although he knew the answer, “Why do you look so gloomy? Don’t worry. Today, I’m really here to help.”

Jiang Cheng couldn’t watch the scene any longer, “If you want to help, then stop chattering and come here!”

A disciple shouted, “The net moved!”

Sure enough, the ropes of the net started to wobble. Wei WuXian beamed, “It’s here, it’s here!”

Thick, long hair formed veils of black satin, surging and swelling around the boats. Amid them, pairs of ghastly hands gripped onto the sides. Lan WangJi backhandedly drew his sword, Bichen, and severed ten-or-so wrists on the left of the boat, leaving only palms with fingers digging deep into the wood. As he was about to cut the ones on the right, a red light flashed past, and Wei WuXian’s sword was already back in its sheath.

The strange shifts of the water had ceased, and the net also became still once more. Although, a few moments ago, Wei WuXian’s sword attacked at an extremely fast speed, Lan WangJi could already tell that the sword he carried was of very high quality. He asked with a serious face, “What is the name of this sword?”

Wei WuXian answered, “Suibian[2].”

Lan WangJi stared at him. Wei WuXian thought that he didn’t hear properly, so he repeated it again, “Suibian.”

Lan WangJi frowned and refused, “This sword has a spirit. Calling it as one pleases is disrespectful.”

Wei WuXian let out a sigh, “Think outside the box, won’t you? I wasn’t asking you to call it whatever you wanted to, but the name of my sword just happens to be ‘Suibian’. Here, look.” As he spoke, he passed the sword over for Lan WangJi to see the characters on the sword. Surrounded by lines and patterns, two ancient characters were carved onto the sheath. It was “Suibian”, indeed.

For a few moments, Lan WangJi was at a loss for words.

Wei WuXian showed his consideration, “You don’t need to talk. I know that you definitely want to ask me why it’s called this name. Everyone asks if it has some special meaning to it. Actually, there’s no special meaning at all. It was just that, when Uncle Jiang gave me the sword and asked me what I wanted to call it, I came up with more than twenty names, but wasn’t satisfied with any of them. I thought that I could let Uncle Jiang give it a name, so I answered, ‘Whatever!’ But, who knew that, after the sword had been forged and taken out, these two characters were on it. Uncle Jiang said, ‘If this is the case, then why not let this sword be named Suibian?’ To be honest, this name isn’t bad either, right?”

Finally, Lan WangJi spoke through his gritted teeth, "... Ridiculous!"

Wei WuXian carried his sword on his shoulder, "You're such a boring person. Don't you see how fun this name is? It's especially good at tricking serious ones like you, and it works every single time. Haha!"

At the same time, from within the virid lake, a long shadow darted around the small boat. After Jiang Cheng finished the water ghouls on his side, he was still watching out for any that they had missed. Seeing the shadow, he immediately yelled, "It's coming again!"

Translator's Notes

1. Cultivators have the ability to use their swords to hover in the air as a way to travel. It usually uses spiritual energy and is one of the things a cultivator learns in their earlier stages. They just stand on the sword (as if it's a skateboard).
2. The word in Chinese means "whatever".

Chapter 17 Refinement—Part Seven

A few disciples paddled and used nets to chase after the underwater shadow. Someone shouted from the other side, “There are some here as well!”

On the other side, a mass of black shadows also whooshed past. A number of narrow boats dragged nets and went over, but they didn’t catch anything. Wei WuXian spoke, “That’s strange. The shape of this shadow doesn’t seem like a human. It’s also sometimes long and sometimes short, sometimes large and sometimes small… Lan Zhan, beside your boat!”

Instantly, the Bichen on Lan WangJi’s back unsheathed and stabbed into the water. After a moment, it flew out of the river with a sharp resonance, taking with it a crescent of water. Yet, it didn’t pierce anything.

He held the sword in his hand with a stern expression. As he was about to speak, a disciple on the other side also drew out his sword, thrusting it toward a dark shadow which swiftly swam by in the water.

However, after his sword went underwater, it never came out again. He chanted the for a few more times, but nothing was retrieved from the water. It was as if his sword had been devoured by the lake, disappearing without a trace. The disciple looked like he was a youth of similar age as Wei WuXian and the others. Without his sword, his face grew paler and paler. An older disciple beside him spoke, “Su She, right now, we still haven’t determined what the thing inside the water is. Why did you act on your own and make your sword go underwater?”

Su She seemed like he was somewhat flustered, but his expression was relatively calm, “I saw that Second Young Master also…”

He realized, before he even finished speaking, how unsuitable this sentence was. No matter what, the Bichen sword or Lan WangJi were not comparable with others. Lan WangJi could enter his sword into water when the opponent was unknown and be just fine, but it might not be the case for others. An embarrassed shade of red seeped through his pale complexion, as if he had been disgraced. He glimpsed at Lan WangJi, but Lan WangJi didn’t look at him, and instead attentively observed the water. In an instant, Bichen was unsheathed again.

This time, the blade of the sword wasn’t inserted into water, but instead, the tip of the sword jolted, and whisked up a piece of shadow from within the water. A pile of wet, black mess fell onto the floor of the boat with a . Wei WuXian went on his toes to have a look. To his surprise, it was a piece of clothing.

Wei WuXian laughed so hard that he almost toppled into the river, “Lan Zhan, you’re so impressive! This is my first time seeing someone remove a water ghoul’s clothing when they’re catching water ghouls.”

Lan WangJi simply examined Bichen’s tip to see if there was anything strange, seeming to have decided to not converse with him. Jiang Cheng spoke, “You should shut up. The thing that swam underwater really wasn’t a water ghoul. There was only a piece of clothing!”

Of course, Wei WuXian also saw it clearly. He just didn’t feel satisfied without teasing Lan WangJi a few times. He spoke, “So, the thing that was sneaking around was just this piece of clothing? Now that’s why the nets couldn’t catch it and swords couldn’t pierce it. Its shape was always different. However, a piece of clothing couldn’t have swallowed up a whole sword. There must be something else inside the water.”

At the moment, the boats already floated toward the center of Biling Lake. The color of the lake was an extremely dark shade of green. Suddenly, Lan WangJi slightly lifted his head, “Go back immediately.”

Lan XiChen asked, “Why?”

Lan WangJi answered, “The underwater beings led the boats to the center of Biling Lake on purpose.”

Just as he finished his words, everyone suddenly felt their boats sinking.

Water immediately started to spread into the boats. Wei WuXian suddenly noticed that the color of Biling Lake’s water wasn’t dark green any more, but almost black. Surrounding the area close to the center, a large whirlpool had formed without anybody realizing. The ten-or-so boats circled around, following the currents of the whirlpool. They sunk as they spun, as if they were going to be sucked inside a gigantic, black mouth!

The -s of drawing swords chorused in the air. One after another, everyone mounted their swords and flew upward. Wei WuXian already hovered above. He looked downward, only to see that the disciple who drove his sword underwater, Su She, was already knee-deep inside the water, the board of his boat already engulfed in Biling Lake. Although his face was full of panic, he didn’t call for help, possibly frightened rigid. Without hesitation, Wei WuXian bent down and stretched his arm out, grabbing Su She’s wrist and pulling him up.

Having added another person, the sword under his feet dipped abruptly, but it continued to ascend. However, not long after, a strong force suddenly came from from Su She, almost pulling Wei WuXian off of his sword.

The lower part of Su She's body was already submerged inside the black whirlpool in the lake. The whirlpool spun faster and faster, and his body also sunk deeper and deeper. There seemed to be something hiding underwater, holding onto his legs and pulling them down. Jiang Cheng originally stood on his Sandu and calmly ascended to about seventy meters above the surface of the lake. As he looked down, he dashed toward them with an annoyed expression, "What are you doing, now?!"

The sucking force of the lake became stronger and stronger. Wei WuXian's sword was superior in terms of agility, but inferior in terms of strength. He was almost weighed down to the point of hovering right above the surface of the lake. He steadied himself while using both hands to haul Su She, and shouted, "Can somebody come here to help?! If I still can't pull him up, I'm gonna let go!"

Suddenly, Wei WuXian felt his collar tighten, and he was lifted into the air. He turned around to see Lan WangJi holding the back of his collar with one hand. Although Lan WangJi merely looked into another direction with an indifferent look, he and his sword carried the weight of three people, and fought with the mysterious force of the lake at the same time. Moreover, their position was still rising at a steady pace. Jiang Cheng was rather shocked, " "

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At this point, Wei WuXian spoke, "Lan Zhan, your sword is quite strong, isn't it? Thank you, thank you. But why did you pull my collar? Can't you hold on to me? I don't feel comfortable if you do this. Why don't I stretch my hand to you and you can grab it?"

Lan WangJi replied with a cold voice, "I do not have physical contact with others."

Wei WuXian, "We're already this familiar with each other, so how am I 'others'?"

Lan WangJi, "We are not."

Wei WuXian pretended to be hurt, "You can't do this…"

Jiang Cheng really couldn't hold it any more. He scolded, "! can't do this!!! Can't you speak a few sentences less while you're held in mid-air by your collar?!"

The group travelled on their swords and evacuated Biling Lake as fast as they could. When they landed, Lan WangJi let go of Wei WuXian's back collar and calmly turned to Lan XiChen, "It is a waterborne abyss."

Lan XiChen shook his head, "Then, this is going to be difficult."

As they heard the name "waterborne abyss", Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng understood immediately. The scariest part about Biling Lake wasn't water ghouls, but the water which flowed in it.

Because of reasons such as terrain or currents, some rivers or lakes often encountered sinking ships and drowning people. As time went on, the area of water would develop a personality. It was like a spoiled young mistress who couldn't tolerate a shortage of the luxurious lifestyle. If no boats of goods or living humans sunk into the water as sacrifices, it would stir up trouble and obtain them on its own.

The people of the Caiyi Town area were all familiar with water, so sunken boats and drowning deaths rarely happened. It was impossible for a waterborne abyss to grow out of here. Now that one had appeared here, there was only one possibility—that it had been chased here from somewhere else.

Once a waterborne abyss emerged, it meant that the whole body of water was turned into a monster. It was extremely hard to get rid of, impossible to remove unless every single drop of water was taken out, all of the people and goods which sunk were fished up, and riverbed was exposed to strong sunlight for a few years. Nevertheless, there was a method that could solve the immediate problem at the expensive of others—to chase it to another river or pond and let it wreck somewhere else.

Lan WangJi asked, "Recently, has there been any place which suffered from a waterborne abyss?"

Lan XiChen pointed at the sky.

He was pointing at nothing else but the sun. Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng looked at each other, understanding it perfectly, > 2 .

Among the cultivation world, there was a countless number of sects and clans, exceeding even the number of stars in the sky. And, among these, there was a titan which stood above the others without a doubt—the QishanWen Sect.

The Wen Clan used the sun as the motif of their clan, signifying that they could “compete with the sun for radiance, match the sun in longevity”. Its sect residence was quite large, almost comparable to a city. It was named the Nightless Sky, also called the Nightless Celestial City, because it was said that there was no nightfall in the city. It could be described as a titan for the fact that no matter in terms of the number of disciples, power, land, or magical tools, there were no other families which could compare to it. A great deal of cultivators took being a foreign disciple to the Wen Sect as a supreme honour. Based on the Wen Sect’s style of doing things, it was highly possible that the waterborne abyss in Caiyi Town was chased here by them.

Although they knew where the waterborne abyss came from, everyone grew silent.

If it was done by people of the Wen Sect, then there would be no result no matter how hard they accused or criticized. First of all, the sect wouldn’t admit it, and second, there wouldn’t be any compensation either.

One disciple complained, “Caiyi Town will be seriously harmed with that sect having chased the waterborne abyss over. If the waterborne abyss grows larger and expands onto the river paths in the town, all those people’s lives would be up to the monster. This is so…”

If it became responsible for the problem passed to them by someone else, the GusuLan Sect would definitely face countless troubles. Lan XiChen sighed, “Let it down. Let it down. Let us go back to the town.”

They boarded new boats at the crossing point and paddled toward an area of town where a lot of people gathered.

After passing the arch bridge and entering the river paths, Wei WuXian started to go at it again.

Abandoning his paddle, he put one foot on the side of his boat and looked into his reflection in the water, examining if his hair was messed up. As if he didn’t just catch tons of water ghouls and escaped from the mouth of the waterborne abyss, Wei WuXian assuredly threw a series of charming winks at both sides of the path, “ , how much for half a kilogram of loquats?”

His age was young, and his appearance was handsome. With such high spirits, it really was a scene of ' . One woman lifted her , smiling with her head raised, “Young beau, you needn’t pay. How ’bout I can give you one for free?”

The * was soft, sounding refreshing and sweet. The speaker's lips moved melodiously, and the listener's ears would be enveloped in fragrance. Wei WuXian cupped his hands together, "If it's given to me by Sister, then I definitely want it!"

The woman put her hand into the basket, and threw him a round, golden loquat, "You needn't be such polite. It's for how handsome you look!"

The boats moved at a fast speed. As the two boats met, they immediately passed each other. Wei WuXian turned around, perfectly catching it, and grinned, "Sister looks even prettier!"

As he showed off and flirted on the side, Lan WangJi was staring straight ahead, appearing quite virtuous. Wei WuXian smugly tossed the toquat in his hand, and suddenly pointed at him, "Sisters, do you think that he looks handsome?"

Lan WangJi didn't expect Wei WuXian to suddenly talk about him at all. Just as he was unsure of how to respond, the women on the river spoke in harmony, "Even more handsome!" Amid this, there seemed to be the laughter of a few men.

Wei WuXian spoke, "Then, does anyone want to give him one? If you only give me and not him, I'm afraid he might be jealous when we go back!"

Chirp-like laughter echoed through the whole river. Another woman came from in front of them, standing on her boat, "Okay, okay, you get two. Heads up, young beau, catch!"

After the second one also landed in his hand, Wei WuXian shouted, "Sister, you're not only pretty, but you're nice as well. The next time I come here, I'm gonna buy a whole basket!"

The woman's voice was vibrant, and she was more daring than the other. She pointed at Lan WangJi, "Get him to come as well. You all can come here and get them!"

Wei WuXian held the loquat in front of Lan WangJi's eyes. Lan WangJi didn't move his gaze, "Move."

And, so, Wei WuXian moved it away, "I knew that you definitely wouldn't accept it, so I never intended to give it to you. Jiang Cheng, catch!"

Just then, the boat which Jiang Cheng was on whirred past. He caught the loquat with one hand, a slight smile appearing on his face, but immediately snorted, "You're being all flirty again?"

Wei WuXian smirked, proud of his success, “Get lost!” Then, he turned around and asked, “Lan Zhan, you’re from Gusu, so you know how to speak in this dialect, right? Teach me. How do you swear in the Gusu dialect?”

Lan WangJi threw a “pathetic” at him, and got on another boat. Wei WuXian didn’t expect him to really answer. He just wanted to tease him, after hearing the amusingly soft Gusu dialect and thinking that Lan WangJi undoubtedly also spoke this dialect when he was young. After raising his head to swallow another gulp of the rice wine, he carried the plump, jet-black jar in one hand, picked up the paddle, and charged over to beat up Jiang Cheng.

On the other hand, Lan WangJi stood side by side to Lan XiChen. This time, even their expressions were similar. Both looked as if they were preoccupied by troubles as they thought about things such as how to deal with the waterborne abyss and what to say to the mayor of Caiyi Town.

An extremely heavy boat came from in front of them, filled with buckets of large, golden loquats. Lan WangJi took one glance at it, and continued to look straight ahead.

Yet, Lan XiChen spoke to him, “If you want to eat loquats, should we buy one basket?”

“...”

Lan WangJi went off with a flick of his sleeves, “I do not!”

He went to stand on another boat.

Translator’s Notes

: These are what one says to command or summon one’s sword.

: In China, it is respect to refer to someone older than you as Sister or Brother, and Younger Sister or Younger Brother if the person is younger than you.

2 ' : Again, this phrase comes from a poem by the famous poet Du Fu. This scene of blossoms and the stream implies that Wei WuXian is the “frivolous peach blossom” in this case, and flirts with the women in the river without caring about his conduct.

: As Caiyi Town is a “water town”, much of the residents there wear bamboo hats which form a conic shape, resembling the famous Vietnamese hats. It is also called a conic hat or a rice hat.

* : This is one of the many dialects of Chinese.

Translator and Editor note:

*** The next chapter involves 9000 Chinese characters, which would result in around 7000-8000 words in English. Most chapters so far are 2900-5000 characters, so do not be surprised this takes longer than usual to get translated.

Chapter 18 Refinement—Part Eight

Wei WuXian bought a bunch of quirky gadgets in Caiyi Town and took them back to the Cloud Recesses. After he arrived, everything was shared between the disciples from other sects. Because Lan QiRen went to Qinghe and there were no classes for a few days, all of the boys played around in complete chaos, rushing into Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng’s room to sleep there. All through the nights, they ate, drank, wrestled, gambled, and viewed . During one of the nights, Wei WuXian lost in a game of dice, and was sent to sneak down the mountain and buy jars of Emperor’s Smile. This time, everyone finally had the chance to satisfy their taste buds. However, on the second day, before daylight even appeared, someone opened the door of the room, revealing the disciples who spread out on the floor in a tangle, sleeping as if they were a group of corpses.

The noise from opening the door startled a few people. As they saw the stone-faced Lan WangJi at the door through their sleepy eyes, they were instantly waken up. Nie HuaiSang furiously pushed Wei WuXian, who ended up in a position with his legs at the top and head at the bottom, “Wei-xiong! Wei-xiong!”

Having been shoved for a few times, Wei WuXian spoke drowsily, “Who? Is anyone else up for it?! Jiang Cheng? The fight is on—like I’m scared of you!”

Jiang Cheng drank too much last night, and his head still ached as he lay on the ground with his eyes closed. He randomly grabbed something and hurled it at where Wei WuXian’s voice came from, “Shut up!”

The object landed on Wei WuXian’s chest, its pages flipping open. Nie HuaiSang eyed it, only to find that the item Jiang Cheng used to hit Wei WuXian was one of his treasured out-of-print illustrated pornography books. As he looked up and saw Lan WangJi’s frigid gaze, he almost

died on the spot. Wei WuXian mumbled a few sentences, hugging the book to his chest, and went to sleep again. Lan WangJi stepped into the room. He used one hand to grip Wei WuXian's back collar, lifted him up, and dragged him in the direction of the door.

After a few puzzled moments as he was carried by Lan WangJi, he was finally half-awake. He turned around, "Lan Zhan, what are you doing?"

Lan WangJi didn't say any words, continuing to drag him forward. Wei WuXian woke up a bit more, along with the lying corpses on the ground who gained consciousness one after another. Seeing that Wei WuXian was caught by Lan WangJi again, he hurried outside and asked, "What's happening? What are you doing?"

Lan WangJi turned his head, speaking one word at a time, "To receive. His. Punishment."

Jiang Cheng had a slow reaction from his sleep and drinking too much, so he just remembered the mess of a floor in the room. Recalling that they broke a countless number of sect rules of the Cloud Recesses last night, his face immediately froze.

Lan WangJi dragged Wei WuXian to the front of the Lan Sect's ancestral hall. There were already a few older disciples of the Lan Sect waiting there, eight in total. Of them, four carried discipline rulers made of sandalwood which were extremely long in length, having numerous square-shaped characters carved onto them. It was a solemn-looking scene, indeed. As Lan WangJi dragged the person over, two of them immediately came up, firmly holding Wei WuXian in place. Wei WuXian half-knelt on the ground, being allowed no room for struggle, "Lan Zhan, are you going to punish me?"

Lan WangJi stared at him coldly, maintaining his silence.

Wei WuXian spoke, "I won't accept this."

At this point, the boys who had woken up also rushed over, but they were blocked outside the ancestral hall, not allowed to go in. They scratched their heads, scared speechless from seeing the discipline ruler. Then, however, Lan WangJi lifted the bottom of his white clothes, and knelt down beside Wei WuXian.

Seeing this, Wei WuXian turned pale with fear. He tried to get up, but Lan WangJi commanded, "Strike!"

Wei WuXian gaped with astonishment. He hurriedly spoke, "Wait, wait, I accept this, I accept this, Lan Zhan. I was wrong… Gah!"

The palms and legs of both of them received about a hundred strikes of the discipline ruler. Lan WangJi didn't need anyone to hold him down. His back was upright and his kneeling position stayed proper for the whole duration. On the other hand, Wei WuXian wailed and howled without holding back at all, making the disciples watching the scene cringe from imagining the pain. After the beating finished, Lan WangJi silently stood up and walked outside after saluting toward the the disciples in the ancestral hall, showing no evidence that he had been injured. Wei WuXian was the exact opposite. After he was carried onto Jiang Cheng's back, he groaned for the whole way. The youths all surrounded them, asking, "Wei-xiong, what in the world happened?"

"It's understandable for Lan Zhan to punish you, but why did he himself also get the beating?"

Wei WuXian sighed, leaning on Jiang Cheng's back, "What a miscalculation! It's a long story!"

Jiang Cheng spoke, "Cut the crap! What on Earth did you do?!"

Wei WuXian answered, "I didn't do anything! Last night, didn't I lose the dice game and go down to buy some Emperor's Smile?

Jiang Cheng, "... Don't tell me you met him again."

Wei WuXian, "That's actually it. Who knew what was wrong with my luck—when I carried the jars of Emperor's Smile and came up here, he stopped right in front of me again. I'm doubting that maybe he really watches me every single day."

Jiang Cheng, "Not everyone has so much time on their hands. What happened next?"

Wei WuXian, "And then I said hello to him again. I said, 'Lan Zhan! What a coincidence—it's you again!'. Of course, he ignored me again. His hand came at me without any words. I said, 'Hey, what's the use of doing this?' He said that if a guest disciple violates the curfew so many times, they need to go to the Lan Sect's ancestral hall to receive their punishment. And I said, 'There's only the two of us here. If you don't say it, and I don't say it, then nobody would know whether or not I violated the curfew, right? I promise that there's no next time. We're already this familiar with each other, so can't you just do me a small favor?'"

Everyone looked as if they couldn't bear to listen to this any longer.

Wei WuXian continued, "In the end, he said that we weren't familiar with a long face, grabbed his sword, and charged over. He paid no heed to our friendship or whatsoever, so I could only

put down the Emperor's Smile and start passing a few moves. His attacks were fast and chased after me so close that I couldn't even throw him off! Eventually, I really was annoyed from him chasing me. I asked, 'Are you really not gonna let go? Huh?!''

"He still said, 'Take your punishment.'"

The boys were filled with the thrill of the story, and Wei WuXian was enraptured as he spoke. He forgot the fact that he was still on Jiang Cheng's back, and gave Jiang Cheng's shoulder a hard smack, "I said, 'Fine!'. Then, I stopped dodging, threw myself over, clung to him, and plummeted outside the wall of the Cloud Recesses!"

"..."

Wei WuXian, "And so, the two of us fell outside the area of the Cloud Recesses together! It was such a bad fall that I saw stars before my eyes."

Nie HuaiSang was dumbstruck, "... He didn't break free?"

Wei WuXian replied, "Oh, he did try. But with me locking him in my arms and legs, he couldn't break free even though he wanted to, unable to even get up from my body. He was as hard as a board. I said, 'How about this, Lan Zhan? Now, you're also outside the Cloud Recesses. We both broke the curfew, and you can't be harsh toward others and loose toward yourself. If you punish me, you'd have to punish yourself as well. Equal treatment. How does that sound?'"

Wei WuXian, "After he got up, he looked like he really wasn't in a good mood. I sat on the side and told him not to worry, that I won't tell anyone else, and that the only ones who knew about this was the sky, the Earth, and us two. And then, he walked off without saying anything. Who knew that he'd do something like this in the morning… Jiang Cheng, walk slower. You're almost shaking me off."

Jiang Cheng wanted to not only shake him off, but, even more so, to make a few man-shaped dents on the ground by slamming his head down, "Is simply carrying you not up to your standards?!"

Wei WuXian, "I never asked you to carry me, in the beginning."

Jiang Cheng was enraged, "If I don't carry you, you'd probably stay in their ancestral hall and roll on the ground all day long. I don't have that thick of a face to lose! Lan WangJi even had fifty more strikes than you, and he even walked by himself. Yet, you have the nerve to pretend that you're crippled. I don't want to carry you any more. Get off, now!"

Wei WuXian, “No, I’m wounded.”

The group joked around on the narrow path made of white stones. They walked right into a person in white robes, holding a book as he passed by. Lan XiChen stopped with wonder and smiled, “What is going on, here?”

Jiang Cheng felt extremely awkward, not knowing how to reply. Nie HuaiSang answered before him, “4 , Wei-xiong was punished with more than a hundred strikes of the ruler. Is there any medicine?!”

The person responsible for punishment in the Cloud Recesses was Lan WangJi. With Wei WuXian’s pained cries amid the group which surrounded him, it appeared as if his condition was extremely severe. Lan XiChen immediately came up to them, “Was this done by WangJi? Is Young Master Wei still able to walk? What in the world happened?”

Of course, Jiang Cheng didn’t dare to say that Wei WuXian was at fault. Thinking back, it was them who urged Wei WuXian to buy liquor. Each and every one of them should have been punished. He could only speak in a vague way, “It’s fine, it’s fine; it’s not that serious! He can walk. Wei WuXian, why are you still up there?!”

Wei WuXian spoke, “I can’t walk.” He raised his red palms, which were swollen a few sizes larger, and complained to Lan XiChen, “ZeWu-Jun, your younger brother is so cruel.”

Lan XiChen examined his palms, “Yes, the punishment is quite severe, indeed. It is likely that the swelling will not subside until after three or four days.”

Jiang Cheng really didn’t know that the beating was so severe. He exclaimed, “What? Not after three or four days? His legs and his back were also hit by the discipline rulers. How can Lan WangJi do this?!” He spoke the last sentence with resentment in spite of himself, and only realized it after Wei WuXian secretly smacked him. However, Lan XiChen didn’t mind it at all. He smiled, “Nevertheless, it is not severe enough to require medication. Young Master Wei, let me tell you a way for your injuries to be healed in just a few hours.”

It was nighttime, at the cold spring of the Cloud Recesses.

Lan WangJi’s eyes were closed as he relaxed in the ice-cold water. Suddenly, a voice rang beside his ears, “Lan Zhan.”

“...”

Lan WangJi's eyes sprang open. Sure enough, Wei WuXian was lying on his stomach, above the blue stones beside the cold spring, tilting his head and smiling at him.

Lan WangJi blurted out, "How did you come in?!"

Wei WuXian slowly crawled up, and spoke as he took off his sash belt, "ZeWu-Jun told me to come in."

Lan WangJi, "What are you doing?"

Wei WuXian kicked off his boots while leaving piles of clothing all over the ground, "I already stripped, so what do you think I'm here for? I heard that your sect's cold spring can cure injuries aside from helping with one's cultivation. So, your brother told me to come here and bathe with you. Except, it's really not nice of you to come here to heal alone. Eep! It really is cold. Brr…"

He went into the water, rolling about due to the freezing water of the spring. Lan WangJi quickly distanced himself a few meters away from Wei WuXian, "I came here for cultivation purposes, not to heal… Do not leap around!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "But it's so cold, it's so cold…"

This time, he didn't intend to emphasize or cause trouble. It was true that most people couldn't become use to the GusuLan Sect's cold spring in a short amount of time, feeling as if their bodies and blood would freeze if they stayed still for just a few moments. So, he could only jump around, intending to warm his body from the movement. Lan WangJi was originally meditating in peace, but with Wei WuXian jumping about, a few splashes of water was thrown on his face. A few droplets trickled down his long lashes and ink-black hair. It was beyond his endurance, "Do not move!"

As he spoke, he extended an arm, and put his hand on Wei WuXian's shoulder.

Wei WuXian instantly felt a surge of warmth coming from where their bodies connected. Feeling better, he couldn't help but to shift closer over there. Lan WangJi was wary of this, "What?"

Wei WuXian replied in an innocent tone, "Nothing. It seems like your side is warmer."

Lan WangJi firmly kept his arm between the two of them, maintaining the distance. He sternly declared, "It is not."

Wei WuXian wanted to get closer to Lan WangJi so that it was more convenient for him to flatter the other. Even though he couldn't go over and was given the cold shoulder, he wasn't angered at all. He glanced at Lan WangJi's palms and shoulder. The bruises were still there, meaning that Lan WangJi really wasn't here to heal. Wei WuXian spoke sincerely, "Lan Zhan, I admire you so much. You really did punish yourself as well, without treating yourself any better. I don't have anything else to say."

Lan WangJi shut his eyes again, without any words.

Wei WuXian spoke again, "Really, I've never seen someone as prim and proper as you. It'd be impossible for me to do something like this. You're so cool."

Lan WangJi still paid him no attention.

After Wei WuXian stopped feeling cold, he started to swim around the cold spring. He swum for a while, but still went near Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan, didn't you notice what I was doing when I talked to you?"

Lan WangJi, "I do not know."

Wei WuXian, "You don't even know about this? I was complimenting you, trying to become more casual with you."

Lan WangJi glanced at him, "What do you want to do?"

Wei WuXian, "Lan Zhan, why don't we become friends? We're already so familiar."

Lan WangJi, "We are not."

Wei WuXian slapped the surface of the water, "Now, you're being boring again. Really. There are lots of benefits if you become friends with me."

Lan WangJi, "For example?"

Wei WuXian swam near the edge of the spring, and leaned back with his arms on the blue rocks, "I'm always really loyal towards my friends. For example, I'd definitely let you be the first person to look at new porn that I get hold of… Hey, hey, come back! It's fine if you don't look at them. Have you been to Yunmeng? Yunmeng is really fun. Yunmeng's food is also good. I don't know if it's Gusu's or the Cloud Recess's problem, but the food in your sect are so bad. If you

come to Lotus Pier, you can eat lots of delicious food. I can take you to pick lotus seed pods and water chestnuts. Lan Zhan, do you wanna come?"

Lan WangJi, "No."

Wei WuXian, "Don't answer everything with negative words. You sound so uncaring; girls won't like it. Let me tell you—the girls in Yunmeng look very pretty, different from the sort of pretty in Gusu." He winked his left eye at Lan in a proud way, "You sure you don't wanna come?"

Lan WangJi hesitated, but still replied, "No…"

Wei WuXian, "Rejecting me without giving me any respect—aren't you scared that I'd conveniently take away your clothes when I leave?"

Lan WangJi, "Get lost!!!"

After Lan QiRen left Qinghe and returned to Gusu, he didn't make Wei WuXian go to the Library Pavilion to copy the Lan Sect's sect rules again, but simply gave him a harsh scolding in front of everyone. Without the parts where he quoted ancient scriptures, it all boiled down to how he had never seen someone so unruly and shameless before, so please get lost, as soon and as far as possible. Please don't go near the other pupils, and especially refrain from tainting his favorite one—Lan WangJi.

As he scolded, Wei WuXian only grinned while listening, feeling no humiliation or anger at all. Immediately after Lan QiRen left, Wei WuXian sat down and spoke to Jiang Cheng, "Don't you think that it's a bit too late, telling me to get lost now? He only told me to get lost after I finished tainting his person. It's too late!"

The waterborne abyss in Caiyi Town created a great deal of trouble for the GusuLan Sect. It was impossible to completely destroy it, and the Lan Sect couldn't chase it to somewhere else like the Wen Sect did. The sect leader of the Lan Sect was in secluded meditation most of the time, so Lan QiRen used all of his energy on this matter. With the lessons becoming shorter and shorter, Wei WuXian's time spent with his friends in the mountains became longer and longer.

Today, Wei WuXian intended on going outside with a group of seven or eight people again. As they passed the Lan Sect's Library Pavilion, he looked through the drape of magnolia branches, and he could just about see Lan WangJi sitting alone by the window.

Nie HuaiSang spoke in a puzzled tone, “Is he looking at us? That’s strange. We didn’t make too much noise, so why does he still look at us like that?”

Wei WuXian, “He’s probably thinking of how to find faults with us.”

Jiang Cheng interrupted, “Wrong. Not ‘us’, but ‘me’. I think the only person he’s watching is you.”

Wei WuXian, “Heh. Just let him wait. I’ll deal with him after I get back.”

Jiang Cheng, “Don’t you dislike how he’s boring and how he’s not fun? Then, you should stop teasing him. This is like pulling whiskers from a tiger’s mouth—stop looking for your own death.”

Wei WuXian replied, “No. It’s exceptionally fun, precisely because of how a living person can be so not fun.”

They only returned to the Cloud Recesses when the time almost reached noon. Lan WangJi sat before the desk, organizing the stack of paper which he wrote on, as heard a creaking noise coming from the window. He looked up to see someone hop inside.

Wei WuXian came up by climbing the magnolia tree outside of the Library Pavilion. His face was beaming, “Lan Zhan, I’m back! Did you miss me? Huh? Without me copying texts for these past few days?”

Lan WangJi seemed like an old monk in a state of meditation, seeing everything as nothing. He even continued to organize the pile of books with a numb expression. Wei WuXian deliberately misinterpreted his silence, “I know, even if you don’t say it, that you definitely missed me. Or else, earlier on, why did you look at me through the window?”

Lan WangJi immediately shot him a glance, his eyes full of silent accusations. Wei WuXian sat atop the windowsill, “Look at you, rising to the bait after just a few sentences. You’re so easy to catch. This way, you won’t be able to maintain your composure.”

Lan WangJi, “You, leave.”

Wei WuXian, “If I don’t leave, will you throw me down?”

Looking at Lan WangJi’s face, Wei WuXian suspected that if he spoke one more sentence, Lan WangJi would really abandon the small amount of self-restraint he had left and nail him onto the

window at once. Wei WuXian quickly added, “Don’t be so scary! I’m here to apologize by giving you a present.”

Lan WangJi refused at once, without thinking twice about it, “No.”

Wei WuXian, “Are you sure?” Seeing that a guarded look leaked from Lan WangJi’s eyes, he fished out two rabbits from his arms, as if he was performing a magic trick. As he held onto them by their ears, it seemed like he was holding two round, chubby snowballs. The snowballs even kicked their legs around. He lifted them in front of Lan WangJi’s eyes, “It’s actually quite strange here. There aren’t any pheasants, but there are lots of wild rabbits. They aren’t even scared of people. What do you think? Aren’t they fat? Do you want them?”

Lan WangJi stared at him indifferently.

Wei WuXian, “Fine. If you don’t want them, I’m gonna give them to other people. We aren’t having much flavors in our mouths, anyways.”

After he heard the last sentence, Lan WangJi spoke, “Stop.”

Wei WuXian extended his arms, “I’m not going anywhere.”

Lan WangJi, “Who are you giving them to?”

Wei WuXian answered, “I’m gonna give them to whoever’s good at roasting rabbit meat.”

Lan WangJi, “Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses. It is the third rule on the Wall of Rules.”

Wei WuXian, “Fine, then. I’ll go down the mountain, kill it outside, and then bring it back to roast it. You don’t want it, anyway, so why do you care so much about it?”

“...” Lan WangJi spoke one word at a time, “Give. It. To. me.”

Wei WuXian grinned on the windowsill, “Now you want it? Look at you—you’re always like this.”

Both of these rabbits were chubby and round, appearing to two balls made of fluffy snowflakes. One had , and lay on its stomach, remaining motionless even after a long while. As it chewed on the lettuce, its pink mouth moved in a leisurely manner. The other one seemed as if it was actually a cricket, constantly hopping up and down. It played around with its companion,

wriggling and leaping nonstop. Wei WuXian tossed over a few pieces of lettuce which he took out of nowhere. He suddenly called, “Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan!”

The energetic rabbit had stepped on Lan WangJi’s inkstone and left a line of black footsteps on the desk. Lan WangJi was unsure of what to do, holding a piece of paper and considering different ways to wipe it off. He didn’t want to pay Wei WuXian any attention, but hearing the exaggerated tone, he thought that there might be an issue, “What?”

Wei WuXian, “Look at how one is on top of the other… Are they…?”

Lan WangJi, “Both of these are male!”

Wei WuXian, “Male? How weird.” He lifted them by the ears, examined them, and confirmed, “They really are male. Well, then, I didn’t even finish my sentence. Why are you so stern? What were you thinking of? Now that I think about it, I was the one who caught them, and I didn’t even notice whether they are male or female, but you even looked at their…”

Lan WangJi finally threw him down the Library Pavilion.

Wei WuXian laughed while in midair, “Hahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!”

With a , Lan WangJi slammed the window close, and stumbled back to the desk.

As he swept a look at the messy piles of rice paper and ink pawprints on the ground, as well as the two white rabbits which rolled around while dragging pieces of lettuce leaves, he closed his eyes and covered his ears.

The clusters of quivering magnolia branches were shut outside the window. Yet, no matter how hard he resisted, he couldn’t shut out Wei WuXian’s vibrant, unrestrained laughter.

On the second day, Lan WangJi finally stopped having classes with them.

Wei WuXian’s seat changed three times. He originally sat beside Jiang Cheng, but Jiang Cheng paid attention to the lessons, and sat in the front row in order look good for the YunmengJiang Sect. This position was too conspicuous, allowing Wei WuXian no room to fool around, so he abandoned Jiang Cheng and sat behind Lan WangJi. When Lan QiRen was teaching in the front, Lan WangJi sat as straight as a wall made of iron. Behind him, Wei WuXian would either sleep like a log or draw scribbles as he pleased. Aside from Lan WangJi occasionally blocking the crumpled pieces of paper he threw toward other people, it was an excellent place to be at. However, soon afterward, Lan QiRen became aware of this trick, so he switched their seats. Ever

since then, whenever Wei WuXian's sitting posture became a bit tilted, he could feel a cold, sharp gaze staring at his back. Lan QiRen would also throw him a glowering look. It was extremely uncomfortable for him to be monitored by the old one and the young one all the time. Moreover, after the Pornography Case and the Rabbit Case, Lan QiRen was certain that Wei WuXian was a basin full of jet-black dye, and feared that his favorite pupil would be stained, which was why he hastened to tell Lan WangJi to stop going to lessons. And so, Wei WuXian sat back in his old spot, and half a month of peace followed.

Unfortunately, the good things never lasted long for someone like Wei WuXian.

In the Cloud Recesses, there was a long wall. Every seven steps, there would be a with intricate designs. All of the designs were different—playing an instrument amid tall mountains, flying in the air on a sword, fighting monsters and beasts, and so on. Lan QiRen explained that the designs of every hollowed out window on this wall was about the life of each ancestor of the GusuLan Sect. The oldest and most famous four windows told the life of the founder of the Lan Sect, Lan An.

This founder was born in a temple. He grew up listening to the chanting of sutras, and thus became a famous monk at a very young age. At the age of twenty, he used the "Lan" from "/ " as his last name and resumed the worldly life, becoming a musician. During his path of cultivation, he met the "fated person" he searched for in Gusu, became ' with her, and founded the Lan Sect. After his partner passed away, he returned to the temple and ended his life there. The four windows were "qielan", "- ", " ", and " , ".

During these past few days, the lessons seldomly involved a topic as interesting as this. Although Lan QiRen introduced it with boring timelines, Wei WuXian absorbed the knowledge for once. After class, he laughed, "So, the founder of the Lan Sect was a monk—no wonder! He ventured into the mortal world to meet one person, and, as she went, he went as well, leaving nothing behind on this Earth. But why would a person like him produce such unromantic descendants?"

Since nobody expected the Lan Sect, which was famous for being orthodox, to have such a founder, they started to chat among themselves. As they chatted, the center of the conversation tipped toward the direction of "cultivation partners", and they started to discuss the cultivation partners of their dreams, evaluating the well-known girls in the different sects. At this point, someone asked, "ZiXuan-xiong, who do you think is the best girl?"

As Wei WuXian and Jiang Cheng heard this, they both looked toward a boy in the front rows of the classroom.

The boy had proud, handsome features, with a vermilion mark on his forehead. His collar, cuffs, and sash belt all had the white peony named Sparks Amidst Snow sewn on. This was the young master sent to study in Gusu by the LanlingJin Sect—Jin ZiXuan.

Another person spoke, “It’s best for you to not ask ZiXuan-xiong about this. He’s already got a fiancee, so his answer would definitely be his fiancee.”

Hearing the word “fiancee”, Jin ZiXuan’s lips seemed to twitch, showing a slight expression of displeasure. The disciple who asked was quite oblivious, continuing with a cheerful face, “Really? Which sect is she from? She must be extremely talented!”

Jian ZiXuan raised a brow, “Forget it.”

Wei WuXian suddenly spoke, “What do you mean by ‘forget it’?”

Everyone in the room looked at him with surprise. Usually, Wei WuXian was always grinning. He had never really been angered, even when he was scolded or punished. Yet, at the moment, there was an obvious streak of hostility on his face. Jiang Cheng didn’t criticize Wei WuXian, either, for making trouble out of nothing, as he usually did. He simply sat beside him with a dark face.

Jin ZiXuan spoke in an arrogant tone, “Is the phrase ‘forget it’ too difficult to understand?”

Wei WuXian smiled sardonically, “The phrase isn’t hard to understand. Instead, it’s hard to understand how on Earth you are unsatisfied with my shijie.”

Everyone whispered to one another. They only understood, after the exchange of words, that they had accidentally stirred up a hornets’ nest—Jin ZiXuan’s fiancee just happened to be Jiang YanLi of the YunmengJiang Sect.

Jiang YanLi was the oldest child of Jiang FengMian and Jiang Cheng’s older sister. Her personality was mild, with nothing too notable; her voice was smooth, with nothing too memorable. Her appearance was only above average, and her talents weren’t astonishing either. Amid the girls from the other prominent clans, it was only natural that she seemed a bit average. On the other hand, her fiance, Jin ZiXuan, was the exact opposite. He was the only official son of Jin GuangShan, with outstanding looks and exceptional talents. According to common sense, with Jiang YanLi’s conditions, it was true that they weren’t well-matched with each other. She wasn’t even qualified enough to compete with the other girls. The only reason why Jiang YanLi was able to enter an engagement with Jin ZiXuan was because her mother was from the

MeishanYu Sect, and the MeishanYu Sect was quite friendly with the sect of which Jin ZiXuan's mother was from. The two madams grew up together, and they had a close relationship.

The ways of the Jin Sect were proud, and Jin ZiXuan inherited every single drop of this. With his high standards, he had been unsatisfied with this engagement since a long time ago. He was not only unsatisfied with the candidate, but even more so with her mother taking the liberty to decide for him, making him grow more and more rebellious at heart. Today, he took the opportunity to break out. Jin ZiXuan asked in reply, "Why don't you ask me how on Earth can I be satisfied with her?"

Jiang Cheng instantly stood up.

Pushing him to the side, Wei WuXian walked in front of him and sneered, "You sure think that you're pretty satisfying, don't you? Where did you get the guts to be all choosy here?"

Because of this engagement, Jin ZiXuan had no positive impressions of the YunmengJiang Sect, and had frowned upon Wei WuXian's behavior since some time ago. On top of that, he boasted himself to be unrivaled among the juniors, without ever having been looked down upon like this. All of the blood in his body rose to his head, and he blurted, "If she's unsatisfied, then tell her to get rid of this engagement! In conclusion, I don't care for your shijie. If you care for her, ask her father about it! Doesn't he treat you better than treating his own child or something?"

Hearing the last sentence, Jiang Cheng's eyes stiffened. With uncontrollable anger, Wei WuXian rushed over and sent out a punch. Although Jin ZiXuan was prepared, he didn't expect Wei WuXian to attack so quickly, before he even finished his sentence. Having suffered one punch, half of his face numbed. He immediately struck back without speaking a word.

This fight startled both of the two prominent sects. On the same day, Jiang FengMian and Jin GuangShan hastened to Gusu from Yunmeng and Lanling.

After the two sect leaders went to see the two who were punished to kneel, and received a severe scolding from Lan QiRen, they wiped some sweat from their foreheads and started to engage in small talk. Jiang FengMian soon brought up the idea of cancelling the engagement.

He told Jin GuangShan, "A-Li's mother was the one who insisted on having this engagement, in the first place, and I didn't agree. Looking at it now, as neither of them are keen, it's best if we don't force it."

Jin GuangShan was shocked. He felt a bit hesitant, as it was never a good thing to end an engagement with another prominent sect, no matter how one looked at it. He responded, "What

do the children know? They can play around however they want to. FengMian-xiong, you and I don't need to pay them any attention."

Jiang FengMian, "Jin-xiong, although we can set the engagement for them, we can't carry out the marriage in place of them. After all, they are the ones who will be spending the rest of their lives together."

This engagement had never been the intention of Jin GuangShan. If he wanted to strengthen his sect's power by a marriage with another sect, the YunmengJiang Sect was neither the only choice nor the best choice. It was only that he had never dared to go against Madame Jin. Anyhow, this was initially proposed by the Jiang Sect. Since the Jin Sect was the husband's side, they didn't have as many concerns as the wife's side, so what was the point of worrying over it? Moreover, he knew that Jin ZiXuan had always been resentful toward Jiang YanLi's status as his fiancee. After some consideration, Jin GuangShan conjured up the courage and agreed to this matter.

At this time, Wei WuXian still didn't know what this fight broke up, as he knelt on the stone path that Lan QiRen assigned him to. From a distance, Jiang Cheng approached with a sneer on his face, "Look at how well-behaved you are, kneeling so properly."

Wei WuXian was gloating, "Of course, I kneel all the time. But Jin ZiXuan is a spoiled brat, so he's definitely never knelt before. If I don't make him kneel to the point that he cries for his parents, 5 * ."

Jiang Cheng lowered his head, pausing for a few moments, and spoke in a soft voice, "Father came."

Wei WuXian, "Shijie didn't come, did she?"

Jiang Cheng, "Why would she come? To see how you lost face for her? If she did come, would she not come to your side and bring you medicine?"

Wei WuXian sighed, "... It'd be nice if shijie came. It's fortunate that you didn't hit him."

Jiang Cheng, "I was going to. If you didn't push me, the other side of Jin ZiXuan's face would also be ruined."

Wei WuXian, "Nah. He looks uglier right now, with an asymmetrical face. I heard that he values his face a lot, like a peacock. I wonder what he'd think after he looked into a mirror! Hahahaha…" After rolling on the ground with laughter, Wei WuXian spoke again, "Actually, I

should have let you hit him, and I should have watched on the side. This way, maybe Uncle Jiang wouldn't have come. But there was no choice. I couldn't help it!"

Jiang Cheng humphed lightly, "You wish."

Although it was only Wei WuXian's casual words, he held mixed feelings, because he knew that this wasn't a lie.

Jiang FengMian had never hurried to another sect in one day for anything related him, no matter if the issue was good or bad, large or small.

Never.

As Wei WuXian saw his melancholy face, he thought that he was still annoyed at Jin ZiXuan's words, "You should go. You don't need to stay with me. If Lan WangJi comes again, you'd be caught by him. If you have time, go visit Jin ZiXuan and look at how idiotic he looks kneeling down."

Jiang Cheng was somewhat surprised, "Lan WangJi? Why did he come? He still dared to come see you?"

Wei WuXian replied, "Yeah, I also thought that he should be praised for having the courage to come see me. He was probably told by his uncle to come check if I was kneeling properly."

Jiang Cheng instinctively felt a foreboding sensation, "Were you kneeling properly?"

Wei WuXian, "I was kneeling properly. After he was some distance away, I found a stick and started to dig in the dirt. The pile beside your foot. There's an ant hole there that I went through tons of trouble to find. When he turned his head, he saw that my shoulders were shaking, and he definitely thought that I was crying. He even came back to ask me. You really should have seen his expression as he saw the ant hole."

"..." Jiang Cheng spoke, "You should get lost and go back to Yunmeng as soon as possible! I don't think that he wants to see you ever again."

And so, on that night, Wei WuXian packed up his things and returned to Yunmeng with Jiang FengMian.

Translator's Notes

3 : These most likely refer to those books of erotic illustrations. As this has already appeared a few times in the story, it might be a good idea to check out what they actually look like. This is an example of a cut-sleeve illustration: https://baike.baidu.com/pic/%E5%BC%A5%E5%AD%90%E7%91%95%E5%A4%B1%E5%A E%A0/534323/0/55e736d12f2eb9383fc59255d7628535e4dd6fe9?fr=lemma&ct=single. Note: the Ancient Chinese people have a strange art style, so please click at your own risk.

4 : This is the same as "xxx-xiong".

: The literal translation of this is "dead fish eyes". One famous example of this are the eyes of Captain Levi, from Attack on Titan.

: Hollowed out windows are made from carving out parts of the wall into designs. There is no glass because it's Ancient China.

/ : This comes from the word for "temple" in Sanskrit. This has been left untranslated because the latter three (xiyue, daolu, and guiji) are also left untranslated.

' : When two cultivators become a couple, marry, and cultivate together, they become cultivation partners. Some call this "cultivation buddies" because it sounds amusing.

- : Learning music.

: Becoming cultivation partners.

, : Returning to nothingness.

5 * : In Chinese, it is a popular saying often said after betting on something. For example, "if that guy's not the criminal, my last name won't be Jia anymore", or "if I can't do this, my last name won't be Yi anymore".

Chapter 19　Contentment—Part One

LONG RANT
Before the translation comes in, I am sure all of you have already heard of the miscommunication we had a few days ago with another fellow translator. If you are still puzzled on what's going on, here's a short recap. This will be a VERY long explanation, so if you are not interested in it, feel free to scroll down to where it says "END", and enjoy the new chapter.

As I was practicing piano some time last week (and yes, the reason behind this being released after so long is because of today's piano examination) (which I failed), I was notified that another translator had uploaded the translation for GDC/FoD's Chapter 19 somewhere else. At first, I was a bit unsure of things, since it is always impolite to suddenly take on a chapter without talking to the original group first. I read through their work and what their thoughts were on the matter. They said that they thought it was nice to give the readers a new perspective on things. Of course, this was a very valid reason. Even some published novels have different translations that allow the readers to choose from. They also seemed quite nice at the end, saying that they were new and even adding in a link to our site.

And then, I read the actual translation. Upon first read, I could tell that they were working alone, from the grammar issues that scattered around. If you read my translations, you can probably tell that Addis and I are quite keen on making sure that no mistakes exist (and if you find one, please comment). Addis does it because she is my proofreader; I do it because I want the best quality of work for my favorite novel. Then again, I couldn't just judge someone because there were tiny issues in their work, so I stopped reading once I got a sense of what this translator was like, so that my own work wouldn't be unconsciously influenced. I was still uncertain on whether or not to let them continue, until, someone posted a screenshot of one section in the chapter. The number "1800" instantly stood out. 3　　, I told myself,　　&　　-=&　　. The original text meant "if not 1000, then 800." I have no idea how they made a mistake like this. Mistakes are fine, but making such a low-level one really made me doubt the existence of their semi-fluent Chinese.

Thus, this was why we were intent on them taking the translation down. Although their level of Chinese may not be enough to translate GDC, it may be enough to translate a modern-day type of danmei. There are countless good danmei in this world, still left untranslated, and a lot of those do not require as strong of a language ability. However, although they said, in their original post, that they will take it down if we asked them to, they did not actually take it down, and instead posted it somewhere so that "those who want to read it can read it." If someone understands how this counts as "taking it down", please contact me and I can give you a gold medal for your reading comprehension abilities. Countless people have already made it a point that this process of translation itself has no rules, so she can do whatever she wants, because

nobody said that it was necessarily wrong to perform such an action. Well, fine. They can keep it up. We cannot do anything to stop them. Although I am a mafia boss, I'm incapable of flying over to wherever they live and watch them delete the post.

Now, onto my second point, from the comments in the various places, I see that a bunch of you are still confused on what happened with the previous translator, Enxiao. When I first joined ExR, after hearing the news that my favorite manga translation group would also be translating Chinese novels, I was ecstatic. Being the effervescent little newbie to the translating world I was, I simply did a quick search of "mo dao zu shi" and left it at that. I most certainly did not know what Novel Updates was. After posting the first chapter, I quickly realized that, oh crap, someone was in the middle of translating this. As the initial stages of panic passed, we notified Enxiao, they gave the okay sign, and I continued translating. I do recognize that it was entirely my fault for wasting a part of Enxiao's work, as they were in the middle of translating a chapter. I admit that I should have searched more carefully to see if it was already in the process of being translated. If I knew that Enxiao was already translating, I definitely would have contacted them.

However, the case is different for this translator. They knew that I was already translating, yet they still continued. The problem here is not because they didn't know the underlying "rules" of the translation world, it is that they think it is okay for two versions to exist, and I think otherwise. I understand that, most likely, they are going to keep translating, no matter what I say, and I also understand that, as humans, we only believe what we choose to, so there must still be a number of people who think I did the same thing to Enxiao. Most of all, I understand that, if they continue to translate, there will be less people who read my version because, although my work quality is higher, my speed is slower, and that is what most readers value. Therefore, it is only common sense that I will drop this project sooner or later and move on.

But, I will not. This is my favorite novel, my favorite author, my favorite writing style, and I will most definitely continue. A famous story told the tale of two mothers, one real, one fake, fighting over an infant, resulting in the real mother letting go, or else her baby would be torn apart. I guess, from now on, that we'll have to exist alongside each other. I remain firmly against the notion that two versions of a translation can exist peacefully together. They remain firmly supporting of it. I will give in to them by saying that, fine, you can translate this however you want to, but, at the same time, I will prove them wrong by raising my child to be the best that it can possibly be. For now, let the fire die. Wouldn't want this to spoil anyone's appetite for the coming events in the story. Spoiler: flashbacks end.

END OF LONG RANT

Wei WuXian lay on his stomach for the whole night. The first half of the night was spent thinking about what in the world had happened to Lan WangJi during these years, and he only

drifted off during the second half. When he opened his eyes the next morning, Lan WangJi had already disappeared into nowhere. On the other hand, he lay on the bed properly, with his arms placed on the sides of his body in a position that made him seem well-behaved.

Wei WuXian immediately took off the blanket that covered him. He dug the fingers of his right hand into his hair. The unexplainable feeling of absurdity and fright still couldn't be erased from his mind.

At this time, two knocks came from the jingshi's wooden door. Lan SiZhui's voice came from outside, "Young Master Mo? Have you waken?"

Wei WuXian, "Why are you calling me so early in the morning?!"

Lan SiZhui, "E-early? … But, it is already nine."

Everyone of the Lan Sect rose at five and slept at nine in a very systematic manner. Wei WuXian, on the other hand, rose at nine and slept at one in a similarly systematic manner, precisely four hours later than those the Lan Sect. Because he lay on his front for half of the night, his waist and back were both aching. He spoke in an honest tone, "I can't get up."

Lan SiZhui, "Uhm, what is wrong, this time?"

Wei WuXian, "What is wrong? I got done by your sect's HanGuang-Jun."

Lan JingYi's angry voice also appeared, "If you continue to speak nonsense like this, you will pay for it. Come out!"

Wei WuXian spoke as if he had been wronged, "Really! He did me for the whole night! I can't go out. I don't have the face to see anyone."

A few juniors stared at each other dumbfoundedly outside the door. People couldn't go into HanGuang-Jun's place without permission, so they couldn't just go inside and drag him out. Lan JingYi raged, "You have no shame at all! HanGuang-Jun is not a cut sleeve. He did ?! I would be more than grateful if you tell me that you did not do . Get up! Take away that donkey of yours and train it properly. It makes so much noise!"

Hearing his method of transportation being mentioned, Wei WuXian quickly climbed up, "What did you do to my Lil' Apple?! Don't touch it. It's gonna kick you."

Lan JingYi asked, "What is Lil'Apple?"

Wei WuXian, “My donkey!” Exiting the jingshi, he shooed the juniors to take him to his mount. He was led to a field of grass. The donkey was there, crying nonstop and making a lot of noise. The cries were because it wanted to eat grass, but a few dozens of round, white pompons gathered on the field, making it so that it couldn’t eat.

Wei WuXian was delighted, “So many rabbits! Here, here, let’s put them on a stick and start roasting!”

Lan JingYi fumed with anger, “Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses! Make it shut up, right now. The disciples doing early readings have already come to ask a few times! If this keeps up, we will be scolded to death!”

Wei WuXian fed it the apple that was given to him for breakfast. As he expected, the donkey stopped making noise as it chewed on the apple, crunching its teeth together. Wei WuXian stroked the back of its neck as he thought about the passage tokens on these juniors and pointed at the round rabbits all over the ground, “I really can’t roast them? If I roast them, would I be chased off the mountain?”

Appearing as if he faced an imminent threat, Lan JingYi hastened to block in front of Wei WuXian with his arms stretched wide, “These are HanGuang-Jun’s. We just occasionally help him look after them. You cannot dare to roast them!”

As Wei WuXian heard this, he laughed so hard that he almost fell on the ground. He thought,

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However, as he thought of the situation of him lying on top of Lan WangJi last night, his laughter stopped abruptly.

Suddenly, rings of the bell came from the the western side of the Cloud Recesses.

These rings were completely different from the ones that told the time. They were hurried and violent, as if a madman was striking it. With a sudden change in their faces, Lan JingYi and Lan SiZhui both stopped joking around with him, dashing toward the bell at once. Wei WuXian knew that something was wrong and quickly followed.

The sound came from a watchtower.

The watchtower was called the “ ”. It was the building the Lan Sect used to summon spirits, with walls made from a special material and incantations carved on them. When the bell of the watchtower started to ring on its own, it only meant one thing—that an accident happened to the people performing the summoning ritual inside.

Outside of the watchtower, more and more of the Lan Sect’s disciples started to crowd around, but nobody dared to go in without careful consideration. The door of the mingshi was black and made of wood. It was tightly locked, only able to be opened from inside. It was not only difficult to violently destroy it from the outside, but it was also forbidden to do so. It was extremely scary for an accident to happen during the spirit summoning ritual, since nobody would know what being it would summon or what would happen if someone broke in. And, ever since the mingshi was built, there were almost no cases where the summoning failed. This made everyone more worried.

Seeing that Lan WangJi didn’t appear, Wei WuXian had a foreboding feeling. If Lan WangJi was still in the Cloud Recesses, he would have hurried over immediately, as he heard the alarming chimes of the bell, unless… Suddenly, the black door bursted open with a . A white-clothed disciple rushed outside, staggering and stumbling.

As his legs weren’t steady, he rolled down the stairs as soon as he came out. The door of the mingshi instantly closed again, as if someone angrily slammed it shut.

In confusion, the bystanders quickly helped the disciple up. After he stood up, he immediately fell down again, his face covered in tears beyond his control. He held onto the people around him, “We should have… shouldn’t have summoned…”

Wei WuXian grabbed his hand at once, speaking in a low voice, “Which being’s spirit are you summoning? Who else is inside? Where’s HanGuang-Jun?!”

It seemed as if the disciple had trouble breathing, “HanGuang-Jun told me to run away…”

Before he finished his sentence, dark-red blood gushed out of his nose and mouth. Wei WuXian pushed him into Lan SiZhui’s arms. With the hastily created bamboo flute still by his waist, he went up the stairs in just a few strides. He kicked the mingshi’s door and commanded, “Open!”

The mingshi’s door opened abruptly, as if it was laughing wildly with a gaping mouth. Wei WuXian entered in a flash, and the door closed right behind him. A few disciples followed him in shock, but the door couldn’t be opened again, no matter what. A guest disciple rushed at the door, shock and anger on his face, and blurted out, “Who on Earth was that person?!”

Lan SiZhui held the earlier disciple up and spoke through clenched teeth, "... Come help me first. His / / are bleeding!"

As soon as he entered the mingshi, Wei WuXian felt a dark energy coming over him.

The dark energy seemed like a combination of the energies of resentment, anger, and arrogance, almost visible to the human eye. Surrounded by it, one's chest would feel a constricted sense of pain. The inside of the mingshi was about ten meters in both length and width. By its corners, a few people lay motionless on the ground. The object of this summoning was set in the center of the array on the ground.

It was nothing else but an arm—the one taken back from Mo Village!

It stood on the ground, as straight as a stick, with the side where it was cut off on the bottom. Four of its fingers were clenched into a fist, yet its index finger pointed toward the sky, as if it was angrily pointing at someone. The steady flow of dark energy that filled the mingshi was emitted by this.

Everyone participating in this spirit summoning ritual had either ran away or passed out. Lan WangJi was the only one still seated properly, at the main position on the east side.

A guqin lay on his side. Although his hand wasn't on the strings, they continued to vibrate on their own. He appeared to be lost in thought or listening to something, only raising his head as he sensed that someone came in.

Since Lan WangJi's face was always placid, Wei WuXian had no idea what he was thinking about. Lan QiRen, who was originally responsible for one section of the mingshi, now lay collapsed and unconscious on the side, his qiqiao bleeding like the disciple who escaped the mingshi. Wei WuXian replaced into his position, turning around and stepping toward the far west, directly across of Lan WangJi. He pulled the bamboo flute from beside his waist, and lifted it to his lips.

During the night at Mo Village, Wei WuXian first used the whistling sound to distract it, then Lan WangJi attacked it from afar with notes of the zither. They only suppressed the arm while unintentionally collaborating like this. Lan WangJi met his gaze, a look of understanding on his face. As he raised his right hand, a melody poured out from the guqin. Wei WuXian quickly joined with the flute.

The song that they played was named “Evocation”. It used the corpse, part of the corpse, or loved objected of a deceased person as a medium for the spirit to follow the melody. Usually, only one section was needed for the spirit to appear within the array. Yet, the song had almost ended, but there was no spirit being summoned.

The arm seemed as if it was angered, with veins twitching visibly. The sense of suppression in the air felt heavier. If someone else was guarding the west side, they would have fallen long ago and ended up in the same way as Lan QiRen with their qiqiao bleeding. Wei WuXian was secretly shocked. It was almost impossible that the spirit couldn’t be summoned with Lan WangJi and him playing “Evocation” together, unless… Unless the dead person’s soul was cut apart alongside with his corpse!

It appeared that this good fellow’s death was a bit worse than his. Although his corpse was chomped into more pieces, at least his soul was complete.

Since “Evocation” didn’t work, Lan WangJi’s fingers shifted, and started playing another tune.

This song had a calm melody, different than the sinister, questioning one from before. Its name was “Rest”. Because both of these songs were quite well-known in the cultivation world, it wouldn’t be strange for anyone to know how to play them, and Wei WuXian naturally followed him.

The YiLing Patriarch’s ghost flute, “Chenqing”, was known far and wide. Yet, right now, with his bamboo flute, he purposely played it with many mistakes and short breaths of air, to a point where it was heartbreaking to hear. Lan WangJi had probably never played with someone with such terrible skills before. After a while, he finally couldn’t bear to continue as if nothing was wrong any longer, and raised his head to look at Wei WuXian with an expressionless face.

Wei WuXian thickened his face, pretending that he didn’t see anything, his tune venturing even more off. As he turned around to continue playing, something strange happened behind him. He turned around to look, and was shocked as he saw it. Lan QiRen, who had lost consciousness, actually sat upright again. He pointed at Wei WuXian with a trembling hand, his face covered in blood and rage, and shouted in a hoarse voice, “Stop playing! Get out! Get out now! Stop…”

Before he even finished saying what to stop doing, he spat out a mouthful of blood, and fell down in the same place, sinking into the deep coma yet again.

Lan WangJi, “...”

Wei WuXian gaped.

He knew what followed Lan QiRen's "stop"— 2 $ 2 $ 2
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Their guqin and flute duet actually angered Lan QiRen so much that he woke up and fainted again. This showed how horrible it sounded…

Yet, even so, the hand still drooped gradually, under the combined forces of the guqin and the flute. Wei WuXian thought shamelessly, #
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Instantly, after the last echo of the guqin, the doors of the mingshi sprang open, pouring in a flood of sunlight. It was likely that the alarms of the watchtower stopped ringing. All of the disciples who surrounded the mingshi rushed inside, their voices calling "HanGuang-Jun".

Lan WangJi pressed his hand on the guqin, suppressing the residual sound of the strings' vibration, and walked over to Lan QiRen to check his pulse. With him leading, the rest of the people soon calmed down. The older seniors laid the bodies of the bleeding few flat on the ground and started to treat them. As they used and medicine, another group of disciples carried a large bell over, intending to cage the arm inside. Although it was a bustling scene, everything unfolded in an orderly fashion. Everyone whispered softly, with nobody making loud noises.

A few people worried, "HanGuang-Jun, neither elixirs nor acupuncture work. What should we do?"

With three fingers still set on Lan QiRen's wrist, Lan WangJi remained silent. Lan QiRen had directed at least eight hundred, if not a thousand, spirit summoning ceremonies before. Of those, a lot included fierce spirits. Seeing even he was harmed by the energy of resentment, it was clear that the amount of resentful energy within this ghost hand was unprecedentedly strong.

Wei WuXian stuck the bamboo flute back beside his waist. He squatted down beside the bronze bell and gently stroked the inscriptions on it. As he was thinking, he suddenly saw a downcast expression on Lan SiZhui's face, "What's wrong?"

Lan SiZhui already knew that he wasn't an ordinary person. After hesitation, he spoke in a low voice, "It is just that I feel slightly guilty."

Wei WuXian asked, "Guilty for what?"

Lan SiZhui, “This hand was coming for us.”

Wei WuXian smiled, “How do you know?”

Lan SiZhui, “Spirit-attraction flags of different levels are drawn in different ways and have different amounts of power. The spirit-attraction flags we drew at Mo Village had a range of only twenty-five hundred meters in circumference. Yet, this ghost hand has a strong killing intent, feeding on human flesh and bone. If it had been within that range in the beginning, with its level of malice, Mo Village would have been a river of blood since long ago. However, it appeared after we arrived… This means that it must have been set there purposely at that time, by someone with ill intentions.”

Wei WuXian responded, “Your academics are quite strong. That was a great analyzation.”

Lan SiZhui lowered his head, “If so, for the lives lost at Mo Village, we should… we should also be responsible. And, now, we also involved Lan QiRen and the others in this matter…”

After a while of silence, Wei WuXian patted his shoulder, “The one responsible shouldn’t be you guys, but the person who sent out the ghost hand. In this world, there are some things impossible for one to control.”

On the other side, Lan WangJi removed his hand. The people of the Lan Sect hurried to ask, “HanGuang-Jun, how is it?”

Lan WangJi replied, “Trace to its source.”

Wei WuXian, “That's right. If we trace to its source, find the full corpse of this ghost hand, understand who he really is, then there’d naturally be a way to save them.”

Although Lan JingYi already knew that he definitely wasn’t a lunatic, he still couldn’t help but to speak in a criticizing tone, “You make it sound so simple. The spirit-summoning did not work, and it became this big of a mess. How can we possibly find it?”

Lan WangJi stated, “The northwest.”

Lan SiZhui wondered, “The northwest? HanGuang-Jun, why is it the northwest?”

Wei WuXian, “Hasn’t it already been shown to you guys?”

Lan JingYi was puzzled, “Shown to me? Who? Who showed it? HanGuang-Jun did not.”

Wei WuXian spoke, “It.”

The people suddenly realized that what he was pointing at was the ghost hand!

The arm steadily pointed at one direction. As someone changed its position, it stubbornly turned back around, back to where it originally faced. Nobody had ever seen a situation like this before, and all were shocked. Lan JingYi stammered, “It? What… What is it pointing towards?!”

Wei WuXian replied, “What else can it be pointing towards? It’s either the other parts of its corpse, or the murderer who made him this way.”

Hearing this, a few boys who stood in the northwestern direction quickly shuffled aside. Giving him a look, Lan WangJi slowly rose, speaking to the disciples, “Care for Uncle properly.”

The few nodded, “Okay! Are you going to travel down the mountain?”

Lan WangJi gave a slight nod. Wei WuXian had already stealthily shifted behind him, talking to himself in a loud, cheerful way, “Yes, yes, yes, we can finally get off this mountain and elope together!”

Everyone looked as if they couldn’t bear to watch the scene any longer. The expressions of the older disciples were especially scary, but a few of the boys were already used to it. Lan QiRen’s face seemed to twitch again, as he lay unconscious on the ground. The disciples thought,
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Translator’s Notes

) : This literally translates into “the room of darkness/evil”.

0 / : Qiqiao refers to the seven openings of one’s head, basically eyes, nose, ears, and mouth.

: In traditional Chinese medicine, needles and acupuncture are often used to cure sicknesses.

Chapter 20　Contentment—Part Two

When cultivators from prominent clans went out on night-hunts, there were usually crowds people who surrounded around them, appearing similar to a parade. Yet, Lan WangJi had always prefered being alone. This arm was quite strange, and could possibly harm other people if it wasn't handled with caution. Therefore, he didn't bring any other disciples of his sect, and took only Wei WuXian, watching him as close as he could.

Wei WuXian originally wanted to sneak away during their expedition off the mountain. However, even though he attempted to run away multiple times, it always ended with Lan WangJi carrying him back with one hand holding the back of his collar. He changed his strategy, sticking to Lan WangJi as hard as he could. At night, especially, he would persistently climb into Lan WangJi's bed, with the intention that Lan WangJi would become disgusted and use his sword to throw him away. Despite this, no matter how hard he messed around, Lan WangJi steadily stood his ground. Whenever Wei WuXian wriggled into his blankets, he would use a light slap to make Wei WuXian's body rigid, and then stuff him into the other set of blankets in a proper position, where he would remain until daylight broke. Wei WuXian suffered a ton of losses and complaint about his sore body after he woke up. He couldn't help but thought, 5 "
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Following the left hand's direction, the two went toward the northwest. They duetted :　every single day, in order to temporarily calm its anger and killing intent. As the travelled near Qinghe, the posture that the arm maintained to show them the way suddenly changed. Its index finger curled back, and it formed a fist.

This meant that what the hand pointed at was just around the area.

They inquired into the matter as they travelled, and arrived at a small city in Qinghe. It was daytime. The streets were crowded with people hurrying to and fro. Wei WuXian was trotting behind Lan WangJi when, suddenly, he was overwhelmed by the pungent fragrance of cosmetics.

As he became used to the mild scent of sandalwood on Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian instantly cringed at the odour. He blurted out, "What are you selling? How does it smell like this?"

The fragrance came from a charlatan, who wore the robes of a cultivator and had the word "deceiving" plastered all over his face. He carried a chest, selling a few items to passerbys.

Seeing that someone asked, he beamed, “I sell everything! The rouge and powder here are both cheap and fine. Young Master, take a look?”

Wei WuXian, “Sure, I’ll take a look.”

The charlatan spoke, “For your wife?”

Wei WuXian gave him a grin, “For myself.”

“...” The charlatan’s smile froze, thinking to himself, # 1 "

Before he lost his temper, another young man turned around and came over. He spoke with an emotionless face, “Do not bother others if you are not going to buy it.”

This man was extremely handsome, his robes and forehead ribbon whiter than snow. His eyes were light-coloured and he had a long sword hung by his waist. As the charlatan was a fake cultivator, he knew a few things about the cultivation world. Having recognized the Lan Sect’s sect motif, he didn’t dare to cause trouble, and ran away carrying his chest. Wei WuXian called after him, “What are you running away for? I really wanted to buy it!”

Lan WangJi spoke, “Do you have the money?”

Wei WuXian replied, “If I don’t, you can give me money.” As he spoke, he extended his hand to search. He didn’t expect to actually find anything, but after a few moments, he did find a delicate, heavy pouch with money in it.

This didn’t seem like something Lan WangJi would carry around at all. Then again, during these past few days, Lan WangJi did quite a lot of things that he could never have imagined. Wei WuXian didn’t even find it strange anymore and took the pouch at once. As he had expected, he could take anything from Lan WangJi if he wanted to, without the other becoming dissatisfied at all. If it wasn’t that he had a tiny bit of knowledge about Lan WangJi’s personal integrity and how good HanGuang-Jun’s reputation was, he almost doubted that Lan WangJi and Mo XuanYu had been involved in some helpless, chaotic entanglement of a relationship.

Or else, why would Lan WangJi be able to endure it, after him going to such great lengths already?!

After walking for some distance, Wei WuXian unintentionally turned around and looked. Lan WangJi was behind him, still standing at the same place, staring toward his direction.

Wei WuXian couldn't help but slowed his footsteps.

He didn't know why, but he vaguely felt that maybe he shouldn't walk so fast, leaving Lan WangJi behind like this.

At this point, someone on the side shouted, "The YiLing Patriarch, five coins for one, ten coins for three!"

Wei WuXian, "Who?!"

He hurried over to look at who was selling him, only to see that it was the fake cultivator. He packed away the low-grade rouge and powder, and now held a stack of paper that had someone even more malicious-looking than drawn on them. He chattered, "Five coins for one, ten coins for three—such a low price wouldn't cost you anything! I recommend three. One for the door, one for the hall, and stick the last on your bedroom wall. With the strong, dense evil energy, it uses poison to cure poison, making sure that no evil beings can come near you!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "That's some shameless boasting! If it's really that effective, would you still be selling one for five coins?!"

The charlatan replied, "Why is it you again? If you're gonna buy it, then buy it; if you're not gonna buy it, go away. If you want to spend fifty coins on each of these, that's fine with me."

Wei WuXian flipped through the stack of "The YiLing Patriarch's Evil-Suppressing Portraits". He really couldn't accept that the scary-faced, hunky man was himself.

He tried to argue with facts, "Wei WuXian was a man famous for his good looks. What is this that you've drawn?! If you haven't seen the actual person, then don't draw anything. You're gonna mislead the younger generation."

As the charlatan was about to reply, Wei WuXian suddenly felt a gust of wind from behind. He dodged to the side.

Although he avoided the attack, the charlatan was thrown off, crashing into a pinwheel stand beside the street. Some people helped him up, while others gathered the fallen items—the scene was a jumble. The charlatan wanted to curse, but as he saw that the person who kicked him was a young master that sparkled all over, appearing to be either rich or royalty, his imposing attitude immediately dropped. Looking again, he saw that the white peony Sparks Amidst Snow was sewn in front of his chest, and he was deflated at once. Despite this, he couldn't take receiving such a kick without any reason, so he asked feebly, "Why did you kick me?"

The young master just happened to be Jin Ling. Crossing his arms, he spoke coldly, “Kick you? Anyone who dares to mention the words “Wei WuXian” in front of me should be kneeling in gratitude if I don’t kill them. Yet, you’re shouting right in the middle of the streets. Do you want to die?!”

Wei WuXian didn’t expect Jin Ling to appear here at all, much less how arrogant he behaved, thinking to himself, " " " "

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Seeing that Jin Ling seemed as if he was still angered and walked a few more steps toward the man on the ground, Wei WuXian interrupted, “Jin Ling!”

The charlatan didn’t dare to make a sound, but his eyes were full of appreciation. Jin Ling turned to Wei WuXian, his words overflowing with contempt, “You still haven’t ran away yet? Well, you may as well stay.”

Wei WuXian laughed, “Huh. Who was it again that was forced down onto the ground, unable to get up?”

Jin Ling sneered and blew a short whistle. Wei WuXian didn’t understand the reason behind it, but, after a while, the heavy huffs and puffs of some sort of beast came from afar.

As he turned around to look, a black-haired of waist height went out of a corner, dashing straight at him. The cries of fear on the street came closer and closer, louder and louder, “A mad dog’s on the loose!”

With an immediate change in his face, Wei WuXian fled as fast as he could.

It had always been hard for him to bring it up, but, although the YiLing Patriarch was known for being ever-so invincible, he’d become a coward whenever he faced a dog. This couldn’t be helped, though. When he was still young, before Jiang FengMian had brought him home, he grew up on the streets, often having to fight for food with vicious dogs. After several bites and chases, he gradually became extremely scared of all dogs, no matter the size. Jiang Cheng laughed at him because of this quite a lot of times. If he told others this, it would not only be shameful, but also believed by only a few people, which was why practically nobody knew of it. Wei WuXian almost died from the fright. As he saw a tall, white figure, he quickly shouted at the top of his lungs, “Lan Zhan, save me!”

Finding Lan WangJi after chasing this far, Jin Ling was shocked, " "
$ Lan WangJi had a serious personality and never chattered or joked. Even a few disciples of the same generation as him feel nervous when they see him, much less these juniors. His level of intimidation was even worse than Lan QiRen's, back in those days. The dog underwent harsh training. Being different from the average dog, it was quite intelligent. As if it also knew that it couldn't behave rudely in front of this person, it howled a few times, then hid behind Jin Ling with its tail between its legs.

This black-haired spiritual dog was a rare species given to Jin Ling by Jin GuangYao. When most people heard that it was a present from LianFang-Zun, they didn't dare to offend him. However, Lan WangJi was different from most people. He didn't care for who gave it or who owned it, disciplining them all in the same strict way. As Jin Ling was using his dog to chase Wei WuXian down the streets and happened to be caught by Lan WangJi, his heart sank,

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Yet, Wei WuXian ducked under Lan WangJi's arm and went behind him, seeming as if he wanted to climb up like climbing a pole. Feeling a pair of arms clasp around him, Lan WangJi froze for an instant. Taking this opportunity, Jin Ling blew two more whistles, and ran off with his black-haired spiritual dog.

The charlatan on the side struggled to get up, still in a state of shock, "The moral degeneration of the world is getting worse day by day. How terrifying are the disciples from prominent clans these days! How terrifying!"

As Wei WuXian heard the barks gradually leave, he finally came out from behind Lan WangJi. He put his hands behind him and agreed as if nothing happened, "That's right, it's getting worse day by day. Men are not what they were in the past."

The charlatan looked at him as if he was looking at his saviour, and hurriedly tossed the stack of "The YiLing Patriarch's Evil-Suppressing Portraits" into Wei WuXian's hands like it was a hot potato, "Brother, thank you so much for what happened earlier! This is a gift for you. If you cut the price and sell one for three coins, you'd still end up earning at least three hundred."

Lan WangJi took a look at the scary-faced hunk in the portrait and did not comment. Wei WuXian, seeing that his price became lower and lower, didn't know whether to frown or laugh, "This is to thank me? If you really want to thank me, you can draw him in a prettier way! ...Stop, don't go yet. There's something I want to ask you. Doing your business here, have you ever heard of any strange events? Or seen any odd things?"

The charlatan replied, “Strange events? Good thing that you asked me. I stay here most of the year, known as the know-it-all of Qinghe. What sort of strange events are you looking for?”

Wei WuXian, “For example, evil spirits haunting around, cases of dismembered corpses, incidents in which whole clans were destroyed…”

The charlatan, “There’s isn’t any here, but if you go a bit less than two miles ahead, there’s a mountain ridge named Xinglu Ridge. I suggest you don’t go there.”

Wei WuXian asked, “Why is that?”

The charlatan, “The Xinglu Ridge is also called the Man-Eating Ridge. Why do you think that is?”

Translator’s Notes

: These are a type of god that is supposedly able to protect households. On the lunar new year, people often put up their portraits on their doors to fend off evil spirits.

: A spiritual dog is a dog which had been trained to gain near-human intelligence.

Chapter 21 Contentment—Part Three

Wei WuXian replied, “Huh, so there’s an evil being that eats humans there?”

Having heard of at least thousands of legends like this and killed at least hundreds of them with his own hands, he found it somewhat boring. The charlatan continued, his voice rising and falling, “That’s right! It is said that, in the ridge’s forest, there is a ‘man-eating castle’ with monsters that feed on the humans living inside it. The monsters will devour anyone who ventures inside it without leaving a single crumb behind. No corpses could be found—there wasn’t a single exception! It’s scary, isn’t it?”

No wonder that Jin Ling also came here. Unable to suppress the soul-consuming goddess at Dafan Mountain, he definitely came for the monster in the Xinglu Ridge again. Wei WuXian exclaimed, “Scary indeed! But, if nothing was left behind, and no corpses could be found, how can it be known that they were eaten?”

After a pause, the charlatan answered, “Of course someone saw it.”

Wei WuXian expressed his admiration, “But, before this, didn’t you say that anyone who ventures inside it would be devoured without any crumbs being left behind, no exception? Then, who on Earth could have started this legend? How powerful would they have to be, having lived to tell the tale after seeing this kind of scene?”

“...” The charlatan, “That’s how the legend goes. How would I know?”

Wei WuXian, “Then, do you know how many people were eaten in the Xinglu Ridge? When were they eaten? Their ages? Their gender? What their names were? Where they lived?”

The charlatan, “I don’t know.”

Wei WuXian, “Qinghe’s know-it-all? Huh?”

The charlatan picked up his basket in a fury, “The legends didn’t have this kind of information!”

Wei WuXian laughed, “No, no, don’t go yet. Let me ask you something else. Is the Xinglu Ridge a part of the Qinghe region? Isn’t Qinghe the Nie Sect’s area? If there really are monsters roaming around Xinglu Ridge, why are they ignoring it?”

To his surprise, this time, the charlatan didn’t answer “I don’t know” again. Instead, a smudge of disdain appeared on his face, “The Nie Sect? If it were the Nie Sect from back then, it definitely wouldn’t be ignored. Before the second day of the legend’s appearance, the Nie Sect would have raided where the monsters roamed at once, in the most resolute way possible. But, isn’t the sect leader of the Nie Sect now, heh, that ‘ ’?”

The leader of the QingheNie Sect used to be ChiFeng-Zun, Nie MingJue. After his father, the last sect leader, was outraged to death by the leader of the QishanWen Sect, Wen RuoHan, he took over the Nie Sect before he even reached twenty, doing everything in a direct, forceful fashion. He was also sworn brothers with ZeWu-Jun, Lan XiChen, and LianFang-Zun, Jin GuangYao. After the Sunshot Campaign, the Nie Sect was quite powerful with him in the lead, its influence almost reaching that of the LanlingJin Sect’s. But, after a / ' , he died in front of the public’s eyes, and so, the next person in line for the sect leader position must have been his younger brother, Nie HuaiSang. Wei WuXian inquired, “Why is he called the ‘head shaker’?”

The charlatan, “Don’t you know the story behind it? No matter what other people ask Sect Leader Nie, if he doesn’t know it, he won’t say anything; if he does know it, he’s too scared to say anything. If you ask too harshly and force him, he’d shake his head again and again, saying as he cries, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know, I really don’t know!’ He’d then beg the other to let him go. Isn’t it obvious why he’s called the ‘head shaker’?”

In the past, Wei WuXian and Nie HuaiSang studied together, so there were a few things he could comment about this person. Nie HuaiSang wasn’t an unkind person. It wasn’t that he was not clever, but that his heart was set somewhere else and used his smarts on other areas, such as painting on fans, searching for birds, skipping classes, and catching fish. Because his talent in terms of cultivation really was poor, he formed his core around eight or nine years later than the other disciples of the same generation as him. When he lived, Nie MingJue was often exasperated by the fact that his brother didn’t meet his expectations, so he disciplined him strictly. Despite this, he still didn’t improve much. Now, without his older brother protecting and supervising him, under his lead, the QingheNie Sect declined day by day. After he grew up, especially after he became the sect leader, he was often troubled by all kinds of affairs unfamiliar to him and looked for helpers everywhere, mainly his brother’s two sworn brothers. One day he’d go to Jinling Tower to complain to Jin GuangYao, and the next day he’d go to the Cloud Recesses to whine to Lan XiChen. With the two leaders of the Jin and Lan Sects supporting him, he still barely managed to settle on the sect leader position. Nowadays, whenever people mentioned Nie HuaiSang, although they didn’t say anything on the surface, the same phrase was written on their faces—good-for-nothing.

Remembering the things that happened in the past, he couldn’t help but to sigh at it.

After Wei WuXian finished asking about the Xinglu Ridge, he still helped the charlatan’s business by buying two compacts of rouge. He tucked them into his clothes and walked back to Lan WangJi. The latter still didn’t appear to have any intention of asking for the pouch back. In silence, they walked toward the direction that the charlatan pointed at together.

There was a large cedarwood forest on the Xinglu Ridge, with a wide trail amid the shade of the trees. After a while of walking, they didn’t meet anything out of the usual. Regardless, in the beginning, they didn’t hold high hopes anyway, and only came here just in case. If a frightening legend of any area was true, then there would definitely be detailed information. At Dafan Mountain, where the soul-consuming goddess haunted, it was easy to find out where the victims lived and what their names were—even the nickname of A-Yan’s fiance. But, if the charlatan was unsure of the names and details of the victims, it was most likely a case of exaggerated hearsay.

After a bit less than an hour, they finally met a setback. From ahead came seven or eight figures, staggering toward them. Their eyes were white and they wore ragged clothing, appearing as if even a light breeze would be enough to blow them over. With their extremely slow speed, it was easy to see that they were a group of walking corpses of the lowest level possible.

Not only were these types of corpses bullied among their peers, if they met a slightly strong human, one could kick over a row of them; if they met a slightly fast child, they would soon be outran by a few blocks. Even if the victim was extraordinarily unlucky and had a few gulps of sucked out of them, they wouldn't die from it anyway. Aside from how awful the corpses looked and smelled, they weren't threatening at all. And thus, if they appeared during a night-hunt, most of the elders simply ignored them and left them for the juniors. This followed the same logic as hunting tigers and panthers instead of rats.

Seeing them walk over, Wei WuXian knew that something was going to go wrong, and ducked back behind Lan WangJi again. As he had expected, when these walking corpses wobbled to about twenty meters ahead of them, as they saw Wei WuXian, they were so terrified that they immediately turned around to retreat, their speed two or three times faster than when they came over. Wei WuXian rubbed his temples, turned around, and spoke in a fearful voice, "Wow, HanGuang-Jun, you're so cool! They were so scared when they saw you that they ran away at once! Haha."

Lan WangJi was speechless.

Wei WuXian pushed him while laughing, "Let's go, let's go. Let's get off this ridge. I don't think that there are any other monsters. The people here are so gossipy that a few useless walking corpses became ruthless monsters in their mouths. Things like the 'man-eating castle' must have been fabricated as well. Such a waste of efforts, don't you think?"

Lan WangJi only started walking after a few more pushes from him. Before Wei WuXian caught up, a series of wild barks suddenly came from far away in the cedarwood forest.

Wei WuXian's face changed instantly. He shifted behind Lan WangJi in lightning speed and squatted into a ball, arms hugging the other's waist.

Lan WangJi, "... It is still far away. What are you hiding for?"

Wei WuXian, "I-I-I-I-I-I-I'm gonna hide first then see. Where is it? Where is it?!"

Lan WangJi listened intently for a moment, and responded, "It is Jin Ling's black-haired spiritual dog."

Hearing Jin Ling's name, Wei WuXian stood up at once, but squatted back down after hearing a few more barks. Lan WangJi continued, "If a spiritual dog is barking in such a way, something must have happened."

Wei WuXian groaned a few times, then stood up with effort, his legs still trembling, "Th-th-th-th-th-th-then let's go and see!"

Lan WangJi didn't move at all. Wei WuXian cried, "HanGuang-Jun, why don't you move? Move! If you don't move, what do I do?!"

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi replied, "First… let go."

The two pushed and staggered. Although they followed the barks of the dog, they only circled two times around the cedarwood forest. The spiritual dog's barks also appeared sometimes near, sometimes far. Having listened to a long while of barking, Wei WuXian finally grew somewhat used to it, at least ceasing to stammer as he spoke, "There's a # here?"

This maze array was definitely created by a person. A while ago, he said that the legends of the ridge were all hearsay, but, now, things were getting interesting.

After about fifteen minutes of barking, the black-haired spiritual dog still wasn't tired out. The two followed the sound after they found the method to exit the maze array. Not long afterward, the silhouettes of creepy, stone castles appeared amid the cedarwood forest.

The castles were made of greyish-white stones, its surface covered in green vines and fallen leaves. Every one of them was made into strange semi-spheres, appearing as if a few large bowls were turned over on the ground.

Who would have known that there really were such stone castles inside the Xinglu Ridge? It seemed that the legends didn't appear out of thin air after all. However, it'd be hard to say whether or not this was a "man-eating castle", and what beings were inside of it.

Jin Ling's black-haired spiritual dog was outside of the cluster of stone castles. It ran around them, sometimes grunting in a low voice and sometimes barking wildly. Seeing that Lan WangJi approached, it backed off slightly out of fear, but, instead of running away, it barked even louder at them. It then looked toward the stone castles, its front paws restlessly digging into the ground. Wei WuXian hid behind Lan WangJi and spoke in a pained voice, "Why is it still not going away…? Where's its owner? Why is its owner gone?!"

From upon hearing the barks until now, they hadn't heard anything coming from Jin Ling at all, not even cries for help. This black-haired spiritual dog must have been brought here by him, and it must have been the one who broke the maze array as well. Yet, it seemed as if a living person just disappeared like that.

Lan WangJi spoke, "Let us go inside to see."

Wei WuXian, "How? There's no door."

There really wasn't a door. The grey-white stones were stuck tightly together, without any space for doors or windows. The dog yelped as it leaped. It seemed as if it wanted to bite the corner of Lan WangJi's robes, but didn't dare to, so it went around him to bite Wei WuXian's clothes instead, tugging him in a certain direction.

Wei WuXian's soul almost flew out of him. He extended his arms toward Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan… Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan… Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan!!!"

The dog dragged Wei WuXian, and Wei WuXian dragged Lan WangJi. The dog lead them halfway around, to the back of the stone castle. To his surprise, there was an entrance about a person's height in the wall. The shape was uneven, and there were fragmented pieces of rocks on the ground, which meant that it had just been violently blasted open with the use of a magical tool. The inside of the entrance was too dark for anything to be seen, aside from a red light that faintly shone. The dog loosened its teeth. It made another series of barks toward the inside, and madly wagged its tail at the two of them.

It was clear that Jin Ling must have broke open the stone castle by force, but something happened to him after he entered.

Bichen unsheathed on its own by an inch. The blade of the sword emitted a cold glow of light blue, illuminating the dark path ahead. Lan WangJi bent down and went inside first. Wei WuXian was almost stirred crazy by the dog, and rushed inside as well, nearly crashing into him. Lan WangJi held his hand to support him, and shook his head, either out of dissatisfaction or unwilling resignation.

The black-haired spiritual dog appeared like it really wanted to follow him, also trying to rush inside, but it seemed as if it was blocked outside by some sort of a force. It couldn't break the barrier no matter how hard it tried, so it could only sit down outside of the entrance, its tail wagging faster and faster. Wei WuXian was so glad that he almost knelt down for it. Taking his hand away, he walked a few steps inside. The distant shade of blue light coming from the sword almost appeared to be white when surrounded in this darkness.

The Xinglu Ridge was covered in a tall, deep forest, so it was quite chilly. And, inside of the stone castle, it was colder than it was outside. Wearing only light clothing, there was wind blowing through Wei WuXian's cuffs and behind his back—the cold sweat due to the dog had already dried. The light at the entrance had disappeared as if it was a candle having been snuff out. The deeper they went inside, the darker and more spacious it became.

The top of the stone castle was spherical. Wei WuXian kicked a few pieces of rocks on the ground. He could hear a slight echo.

He finally couldn't endure it any longer and stopped in his tracks, pressing his right hand on his temple and scrunching his brows.

Lan WangJi turned around to ask, "What happened?"

Wei WuXian replied, "... It's so loud."

Inside the stone castle, there was only dead silence. It was as quiet as a cemetery. Actually, it itself also seemed similar to a cemetery.

But, in Wei WuXian's ears, right now, they were already surrounded by noise.

Translator's Notes

: The original phrase used for this was a traditional Chinese saying, which pretty much means that Nie HuaiSang answers "I don't know" for every question directed towards him. As an adequate translation has yet to be found, this has been slightly modified to keep the flow of the English.

0 ' : A qi deviation, or a qigong deviation, refers to a physiological or psychological disorder that happens when someone cultivates using an "improper" method or a flawed technique (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zou_huo_ru_mo).

+ : The "yang" here refers to the "yang" in "yin yang". Yang energy represents life and goodness, while yin energy (also translated as "dark energy" or "evil energy" for a couple of times) represents death and evil.

) # : A maze array is most likely an array that can be used to confuse people's sense of direction in order to trap them somewhere.

Chapter 22 Contentment—Part Four

The noise came from all around them.

It was an ocean of whispers, rustles, and giggles, from in front and behind, above and below. The voices involved both male and female, old and young, loud and quiet. Wei WuXian could even hear a few fragmented sentences, but they came and went, not allowing him to catch any specific words.

It really was too loud.

Wei WuXian continued to press on his temple with one hand, and used the other to grab a palm-sized Compass of Evil from the Qiankun Bag. The pointers on the compass shakily spun two times, then started to spin faster and faster. A few moments later, it spun madly around!

Last time, on Dafan Mountain, it had already been strange when the Compass of Evil didn't find the direction. This time, it went as far as to spin all by itself, without pausing for a single moment. This situation was even more unbelievable than the pointers not moving at all!

The foreboding shadow in Wei WuXian's heart grew denser. He called out loud, "Jin Ling!"

The two had already walked for a while inside the stone castle, but they hadn't seen anyone. Wei WuXian had shouted a few times, without receiving any reply. The first stone rooms were all empty, but, as they went in deeper, in the center of one of the rooms, there was a black coffin.

It was quite odd for a coffin to appear here. However, the wood used was a deep black, and the shape was also crafted in a skilled way. Seeing this, Wei WuXian had an exceptionally strong affinity toward it. He couldn't help but patted it a few times. The wood was sturdy and the sound was firm. He praised it, "What a nice coffin."

Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian stood on opposite sides of the coffin. After passing a look between them, they extended their arms at the same time and opened the lid.

The moment the lid was opened, the noise around them suddenly multiplied, flooding through Wei WuXian's ears in the manner of tidal water. It was as if, before this, they were secretly watched by countless pairs of eyes—the owners of the eyes silently monitored and discussed every word they spoke, every action they performed, and suddenly became agitated as they saw that the coffin was about to be opened. Wei WuXian thought of a few dozen possibilities, already prepared to fend against strong odours of rancidity, stretching claws of monsters, an overflow of

poisonous water, toxic smoke that dispersed quickly, or attacks from resentful spectres. Of course, his greatest wish was to see Jin Ling. Despite this, nothing happened. Nothing.

Surprisingly, this was an empty coffin.

Wei WuXian was a bit startled, but also a bit disappointed at the fact that Jin Ling wasn't stuck in here. Lan WangJi went slightly nearer. Bichen unsheathed by itself for a few inches, its cold light shining on the bottom of the coffin. Only then, did Wei WuXian notice how it wasn't that the coffin was empty, but that the object inside was a lot smaller than what he had expected, and hid inside the deepest part of the coffin.

Inside the coffin, there lay a long .

The sword had no sheath. The hilt seemed to have been casted from gold, appearing to be quite heavy in weight. Its body was slender and its blade shone. Resting on a layer of red cloth at the bottom of the coffin, it reflected a bloody shade of scarlet, emitting a chilling air of destruction.

A sword was put inside a coffin instead of a corpse. There really wasn't anywhere not peculiar about these stone castles in the Xinglu Ridge, revealing mysteries every step they took.

The two closed the coffin lid and continued walking. They found other coffins like this in some other rooms. Looking at the texture of the wood, their ages were all different. And, within every coffin, there was a long sword. Even until they went inside the last room, there still wasn't any trace of Jin Ling. Wei WuXian closed the lid of the coffin, feeling slightly worried.

Seeing his knitted eyebrows, Lan WangJi thought for a moment, put the guqin horizontally on the coffin, and raised his hand. A melody poured from his fingers.

He only played a short excerpt, and then took his right hand away from the guqin. He stared attentively at the still-vibrating strings.

Suddenly, the strings quivered, and one note sounded on its own.

Wei WuXian asked, " ?"

was a famous piece composed by an ancestor in the GusuLan Sect. Different from < , it was used when the victim's identity was unknown and there wasn't a medium. The player used notes of the guqin to inquire, asking questions to the victim, while the victim's answers would be transformed into melodies by and shown on the strings.

If the strings vibrated on their own, it meant that Lan WangJi had already brought a spirit in the castle here. After this, the two would start asking and answering using the language of the guqin.

The language of the guqin was a special skill unique to the GusuLan Sect. Although Wei WuXian knew a wide variety of things, there were still some that he was unable to learn, such as the language of the guqin. He whispered, “HanGuang-Jun, help me ask what is this place, what is it for, and who built it.”

As he mastered the language, without any hesitation, Lan WangJi confidently played a few limpid notes. After a few moments, the strings played two notes on their own. Wei WuXian quickly asked, “What did it say?”

Lan WangJi, “I do not know.”

Wei WuXian, “What?”

Lan WangJi replied in an unhurried manner, “It said, ‘I do not know’.”

“...” Wei WuXian looked at him, suddenly remembering a conversation about “whatever” a few years ago. Touching his nose, he was at a loss for words, and thought, % 6
, " .

With the first question unanswered, Lan WangJi played another sentence. The strings responded again, with the same two notes as before. Wei WuXian could tell that, this time, the answer was “I don’t know” as well. He asked, “What did you ask it, this time?”

Lan WangJi, “How it died.”

Wei WuXian, “If it was secretly killed when it was not paying attention, then it’d explain why it doesn’t know how it died. Why don’t you ask it if it knows who killed it?”

Lan WangJi raised his hands to play another phrase. Yet, the answer was the same two notes—“I don’t know”.

It was a spirit who had been trapped here, yet it didn’t know where this was, how it died, and who killed it. This was also Wei WuXian’s first time meeting such a deceased person. With a change of thought, he spoke again, “Then, let’s ask something else. Ask him whether it’s a man or a woman. There’s no way that it doesn’t know this.”

Lan WangJi did as he was told. After he took away his hands, another string sounded in a strong way. Lan WangJi translated, “A man.”

Wei WuXian, “We finally know about something, huh? Ask again, whether or not a boy of fifteen or sixteen entered here.”

It answered, “Yes.”

Wei WuXian asked again, “Then where is he right now?”

The strings paused for a moment, then replied. Wei WuXian hurried to ask, “What did he say?”

Lan WangJi’s face was solemn, “It said, ‘Right here.’”

Wei WuXian was dumbfounded.

“Here” probably referred to this stone castle. But, before this, they searched through the whole place, and hadn’t seen Jin Ling. Wei WuXian spoke, “It can’t lie, right?”

Lan WangJi, “I am here, so it cannot.”

Indeed, it couldn’t. The person inquiring was HanGuang-Jun. Under his control, the spirit who came was unable to lie, and had definitely been answering the truth. Wei WuXian proceeded to search around this room, looking for any mechanisms or secret rooms that he had missed. After a thinking for a moment, he played a few more phrases. However, after he received the answer, his expression changed slightly. Seeing this, Wei WuXian asked, “What did you ask this time?”

Lan WangJi, “How old he was; where he was from.”

Both of these questions were attempts to find out the identity of the spirit. Wei WuXian knew that he definitely received some sort of an unconventional answer, “How was it?”

Lan WangJi, “Fifteen, from Lanling.”

Wei WuXian’s expression changed as well.

The soul that “ ” had found was Jin Ling?!

He listened intently. Amid the noise that seemed to have bombarded here, there really seemed to be a few weak shouts coming from Jin Ling. They were faint, however, and indistinct.

Lan WangJi continued to ask. Wei WuXian knew that he was asking for the precise location, so he stared fixedly at the strings of the guqin, waiting for Jin Ling's answer.

This time, the answer came a bit slower. After he finished listening, Lan WangJi spoke to Wei WuXian, "'Stand at where you are, face the southwest, and listen to the strings. After each note is played, walk forward one step. When the sound stops, it will be right in front of you.'"

Without saying a word, Wei WuXian turned toward the southwest. Behind him came seven notes of the guqin, so he walked seven steps forward. However, nothing had appeared in front of him.

The notes continued, but the pause between them grew longer and longer, and he also walked slower and slower. Another step, and another, and another…

After the sixth step, the guqin finally silenced. No more notes sounded.

And, before him, there was only a wall.

The wall was made of grey-white rock bricks, pieced together tightly. Wei WuXian turned around, "... He's in the wall?!"

Bichen unsheathed. Four streaks of blue light swept past, and a neat pound sign had been carved onto the wall. The two went forward to take apart the bricks. After removing some of them, a large sheet of black dirt was exposed.

It seemed that the stone castle was made to be double-layered, filled with dirt between the two layers of hard rock. Using his bare hands, Wei WuXian dug out a large chunk of dirt. Surrounded by the coal-black dirt, there was a human's face, eyes tightly shut.

It was the missing Jin Ling!

Having his face enveloped in dirt, as soon as it appeared, air poured into Jin Ling's mouth and nose. He immediately started to cough and breathe. As Wei WuXian saw that he was still alive, his heart finally calmed. Jin Ling really did almost die. Or else, " " wouldn't have caught the still-alive soul that was about to leave his body. The good thing was that only a short while passed after he was buried into the wall. If it took them any longer, he would have suffocated to death.

The two hastened to dig him out of the wall. However, who knew that, as if dirt clung onto a carrot being pulled out of the ground, the moment Jin Ling's upper body emerged from the dirt, the sword on his back caught on something else and dragged it out.

It was the ashen bone of a human arm!

Lan WangJi laid Jin Ling flat onto the ground and felt for his pulse. Wei WuXian, on the other hand, took up the sheath of Bichen, and skillfully started to poke around in the dirt, following the length of the bone. After a short while, a complete skeleton appeared before their eyes.

This skeleton was the same as how Jin Ling looked, buried inside the wall in a standing position. With ghastly pale bones and pitch-black dirt—the contrast was distinct yet glaring to the eye. Wei WuXian dug a bit more through the ground, and broke away a few pieces of bricks on the side. After some more rustling around, sure enough, he found another skeleton nearby.

This one hadn't decayed completely yet. There were still some flesh on the bones, and long, messy hair on the skull. From the ragged clothing in the shade of a watered down red, he could tell that this was a woman. However, she wasn't standing, with her skeleton bending down. The reason of this was that there was a third skeleton beside her, squatting down by her feet.

Wei WuXian stopped digging further.

He took a few steps back. The noise in his ears was as wild and turbulent as tidal waves.

He could almost be sure of it. The inside of this stone castle's thick walls was packed with human corpses.

Above, below, southeast, northwest; standing, sitting, lying, squatting…

Just what on Earth was this place?!

Translator's Notes

: Although this was translated as a "sword", the Chinese character of this is different from that of a sword's. The character used here means "knife". The difference between a "sword" and a "knife" is that the first attacks by stabbing, while the second attacks by slicing or chopping. However, they both look like a "sword" in Western standards.

: The literal meaning of this is "to ask a spirit".

Chapter 23 Malice—Part One

At this moment, the unconscious Jin Ling suddenly sat up.

In front of the two, he clumsily stood up with closed eyes. Wei WuXian wanted to see what he was going to do, so he didn't do anything as Jin Ling slowly walked around him, took one stride, and stepped back into the wall where he stood just a while ago. He placed his arms flat beside his body. Even the position was the same as before.

Wei WuXian pulled him out of the wall again, feeling that the situation was both hilarious and strange. As he was about to tell Lan WangJi that it was best not to stay here for long, he suddenly quivered out of fright, hearing a few barks that came from afar. Ever since they went in, the black-haired spiritual dog behaved itself, wagging its tail as it sat before the entrance. It waited for them to bring back its master in an anxious yet pathetic way, without barking anymore. However, right now, its barks were fiercer than ever.

Lan WangJi spoke, "Something is wrong outside of the castle."

As he reached out to help Jin Ling, Wei WuXian beat him to it and carried Jin Ling up on his back, "Let's go out and see!"

The two quickly went back the same way they came. Bending down to exit, they saw the spiritual dog face them with its back, growling with the bottom of its throat at a certain direction. Although Wei WuXian managed to come over, he really couldn't bear this type of sound, and involuntarily took a few steps backward. When the dog turned around and saw that he had Jin Ling on his back, it instantly dashed over, causing Wei WuXian to scream. Lan WangJi shifted in front of him just as he was about to throw Jin Ling down.

The spiritual dog immediately stopped, its tail between its legs again. The reason why it didn't stick its tongue out was that it held something inside its mouth. Lan WangJi went forth, bent down, took out a scrap of cloth from between its teeth, and handed it over to Wei WuXian. It seemed like it was part of a piece of clothing. Before this, there must have been someone either roaming or spying around the area, and they must have appeared suspicious, or else the dog's barks wouldn't have been teeming with hostility. Wei WuXian declared, "They haven't gone far yet. Let's go after them!"

Yet, Lan WangJi responded, "That is not necessary. I know who they are."

Wei WuXian, “I also know. It must have been the same group of people who spread rumors of the Xinglu Ridge, let out the walking corpses, set up the maze array, and built the stone castles. And those sabers. But, if we don’t catch them now, it’d be a bother to find them later.”

Lan WangJi, “I will go after them. What about you and Jin Ling?”

Wei WuXian, “I’ll take him down the Xinglu Ridge and settle down somewhere in Qinghe, around where we met that charlatan. Let’s meet up there.”

The pace of the conversation was extremely fast. Lan WangJi only paused for a moment, and Wei WuXian added, “Go. Any later and the person would have run away. I’ll be back!”

Hearing the ‘I’ll be back’, Lan WangJi took one deep look at him and walked off without any more words. The spiritual dog wanted to throw itself over again. Wei WuXian immediately shouted, “W-w-w-wait! Take the dog away! Take it!!!”

Lan WangJi had to come back again. He looked down at the black-haired spiritual dog. Too scared to put up any resistance, it yapped as it trailed behind Lan WangJi, turning around to look at Jin Ling once in awhile. Wei WuXian wiped a few drops of sweat from his forehead. After he looked at the group of white castles once more, he picked up Jin Ling again and went down the Xinglu Ridge.

At the moment, it was already near dusk. With a boy on his back and both of them covered in dirt, they received a lot of attention from passersby. Wei WuXian went back to the street where Jin Ling used the dog to chase him and found an inn. Using the money he fished out of Lan WangJi, he bought two new outfits and got a room. He first took off Jin Ling’s sect robe, which had been crumpled after it was buried in dirt, then pulled off his boots. Suddenly, his movements came to a halt.

There appeared to be an area of shadow on Jin Ling’s lower leg. Squatting down and rolling up the boy’s trousers, Wei WuXian discovered that this wasn’t a shadow, but a black bruise. And, it wasn’t a bruise that came from being injured, it was a Curse Mark.

A Curse Mark was a marking made by an evil being on its prey. If it appeared, it meant that the person had offended something of extreme malice. If it left a mark, it would find you no matter what, possibly after a long time, and possibly tonight. The consequences ranged from having the body part with the marking taken away or just death.

Jin Ling’s whole leg had turned black, and the bruise was still stretching upward. Wei WuXian had never seen a Curse Mark in such an intense shade of black and covering such a large area.

The more he looked at it, the sterner his face grew. He put Jin Ling's legs down and undid Jin Ling's undergarment. He only felt relief after he saw that his chest and stomach areas were all clean, not affected by the Curse Mark yet.

At this moment, Jin Ling opened his eyes.

He was confused for quite a while. With his body naked and cold all around, he came to at once. He immediately got up and roared with a flushed face, "Wh-wh-wh-what are you doing?!"

Wei WuXian grinned, "Oh hey, you're awake."

Appearing as if he had encountered a great shock, Jin Ling shut the front of his undergarment and shrunk toward the corner of the bed, "What do you want?! Where are my clothes?! Where's my sword?! Where's my dog?!"

Wei WuXian spoke, "I was just about to put on your clothes for you."

His expression and tone were as kind as those of a grandmother who wanted to put on a jacket for her grandson. Jin Ling leaned against the wall with disheveled hair, "I am not a cut-sleeve!!!"

Wei WuXian beamed, "What a coincidence—I am!!!"

Jin Ling snatched the sword that lay beside the bed in a manner so courageous that it seemed if Wei WuXian walked one more step forward, he would kill him and then commit suicide to prove his innocence. Wei WuXian finally managed to stop laughing, "Why are you so scared? It was only a joke! I spent so much effort to dig you out of the wall, and you don't even thank me."

Amid the ruckus, Jin Ling combed his hand through his messy hair so that it looked a bit more decent, and continued to rage, "If not for this, the fact that y-y-y-you dared to take off my clothes w-w-would've gotten you killed for thousands of times!"

Wei WuXian, "Please don't. Dying once was already painful enough. There, there. Put the sword down."

With a muddled look, Jin Ling did as he was told and put the sword down.

When they played Inquiry, although Jin Ling's soul left his body and he couldn't remember a lot of things, amid the haze, he knew that it was the person in front of him who dug him out and carried him down the mountain. For some time, after he was buried in the wall, he had been conscious for a while, the fear and despair in his heart at their height. Yet, he really didn't expect

that the one who freed him from his fear and despair was this person whom he had hated ever since the first time they met. The color of his face switched back and forth between white and red. He was also both dizzy and embarrassed, his thoughts still fluttering everywhere. Suddenly, his eyes went toward the window and was shocked to see that the sky was already dark, with a few stars scattered here and there. Coincidentally, Wei WuXian bent down to pick up the new clothes that fell on the ground. Jin Ling hopped off the bed, put on his boots, grabbed his jacket, and sprinted out of the room.

Wei WuXian originally thought that, after going through so much, he would probably stay listless for a while. Who knew that young people were so energetic, as he disappeared into the distance like a gust of wind. Remembering the Curse Mark on his leg that was no trivial matter, he quickly shouted, “What are you running away for?! Come back!”

Jin Ling ran as he put on his soiled, crumpled sect robe, “Don’t follow me!” He was light on his feet and stepped out of the inn in a few long strides. After chasing for a few blocks, Wei WuXian actually lost him.

After searching for a while, twilight came, and the people on the streets also lessened. Wei WuXian was quite annoyed, “Damn. How can this child do such a thing?!”

As he was about to give up, the angered voice of a young man came from in front of him, at the far end of the street, “I only said a few things about you, and you disappeared into nowhere. Are you some young mistress? Your temper has been growing worse and worse!”

Jiang Cheng!

Wei WuXian immediately slid into an alleyway. A second later, Jin Ling’s voice also appeared, “I already came back with nothing wrong with me, didn’t I? Stop nagging!”

It appeared that Jin Ling didn’t come to Qinghe alone. Well, no wonder. Last time, at Dafan Mountain, Jiang Cheng had been there to assist him, so why wouldn’t he have come this time? However, looking at this now, it seemed that the two had a quarrel in the town of Qinghe, which was why Jin Ling went up the Xinglu Ridge alone. The reason why he hastened to run away was probably that Jiang Cheng threatened to do something to him if he didn’t come back before dark or something like that.

Jiang Cheng, “Nothing wrong? You look like you just rolled around in a muddy ditch, and you say there’s nothing wrong with you! Don’t you think that it’s an embarrassment to be wearing your sect’s uniform? Hurry back and change into something else! Speak. What did you run into today?”

Jin Ling replied impatiently, “I already said that I didn’t run into anything. I tripped, and it was a waste of time. Ow!” He shouted, “Don’t tug on me like that! I’m not three-years-old!”

Jiang Cheng spoke in a harsh tone, “Is it that you think I can’t discipline you any longer? Let me tell you that, even if you’re thirty, I’d still be able to tug you. Next time, if you dare to run around without telling anyone again, the whip waits upon you!”

Jin Ling, “I went alone exactly because I didn’t want anyone to help or discipline me.”

Wei WuXian considered, I don’t know about anything else, but Jiang Cheng was quite right when he scolded that Jin Ling had the temper of a young mistress.

Jiang Cheng, “So, what now? What did you catch? Where’s the spiritual dog that your uncle gave you?”

It was chased into some random corner by Lan Zhan. Just as Wei WuXian was thinking, two familiar barks came from the other side of the alley.

Wei WuXian’s demeanor changed at once. Legs moving on their own, he rushed outside as if he was chased by poisonous arrows. The black-haired spiritual dog sprinted over from the other end, passed Wei WuXian, and threw itself toward Jin Ling’s legs, affectionately brushing him with its tail.

With the dog appearing here, it must have meant that Lan WangJi had already caught whoever was spying near the stone castles and went to point of rendezvous that they settled on earlier. However, at the moment, Wei WuXian had no time to think about these things.

As he ran, he just happened to end up right before Jiang Cheng, Jin Ling, and a bunch of other Jiang Sect’s disciples.

After both sides stayed still for a moment, Wei WuXian silently turned around and fled.

Having only managed a short distance, he heard a sizzling noise, and a purple electric current wrapped around his lower leg as if it was a snake. Numbness and pain surged through his body from bottom to top, and he fell at once, after a pull from behind. Then, someone picked him up with the back of his collar. Wei WuXian immediately tried to find the Spirit-Locking Bag, but the other grabbed it before him.

Jiang Cheng walked a few steps while holding him, entered the nearest shop, and kicked open the wooden bolt that was already half-latched.

The owner was getting ready to close the shop for the night. Suddenly, seeing that a fancy-clothed, dark-faced young man kicked open the door and walked inside with someone in his hand, appearing as if he was going to disembowel the victim right here, the owner was so frightened that he couldn't speak. A disciple went up and whispered a few things in his ear. With some silver pushed into his hands, he quickly fled to the back of the hall and never came out again. Without any further instructions, the Jiang Sect's disciples instantly spread out from the inside to the outside, making it so that nothing could enter or escape the place.

Jin Ling stood on the side, seeming as if he wanted to say a few things, but was too shocked to do so. Jiang Cheng glowered at him, "I'll take care of you later. Stay here!"

From the beginning of his memory until now, Jin Ling had never seen such a look on Jiang Cheng's face before. This uncle of his who led the prominent YunmengJiang Sect ever since a young age had always been cold and dark. When he spoke, he was willing to neither show mercy nor do good. Yet, right now, although he was trying hard to suppress unnecessary facial expressions, his eyes were alarmingly intense.

Although his face had always been clouded, marked with arrogance and satire, it seemed as if every corner of it had come alive. It was difficult to determine whether it was vengeful wrath, fathomless hatred, or raving ecstasy.

Translator's Notes

: This was translated as "sword" in the last chapter, but, thanks to a few commenters, it is now changed to saber, a more accurate phrase.

) : The literal translation is "evil curse mark/scar".

6 : In the Ancient Chinese style of clothing, a set of undergarments can include a shirt and a pair of trousers, a shirt and a skirt, or a long robe. All pieces are white in color and loose-fitting. The shirt is worn in a wraparound way, like a bathrobe. Although they are called undergarments, they are more like sleeping attire but worn both to sleep and under normal clothing. Yes, people still wear "underwear" under these, so, technically, Wei WuXian is not peeling Jin Ling's underwear off, unlike most of what your fujo brains are thinking at the moment (e.g. "oh nooo WWX is looking at another person's *****!")

Chapter 24 Malice—Part Two

Jiang Cheng added, “Lend me your dog.”

Jin Ling pulled himself out of the daze. He hesitated for a moment and only whistled after Jiang Cheng shot him two lightning-sharp beams from his eyes. The dog dashed over in just a few leaps. Wei WuXian, body as stiff as an iron board, could only be dragged forward, walking one step at a time.

Jiang Cheng found an empty room and threw Wei WuXian inside, closing the door behind him. The dog followed them inside and sat by the door. Wei WuXian had his eyes tightly locked on it, afraid that it would pounce on him at the next possible moment. Remembering how he had been controlled in just a short amount of time, he exclaimed in his heart that Jiang Cheng really knew the best way to deal with him.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng slowly sat down by the table and poured himself a cup of tea.

For a moment, no one spoke a word. The cup of tea was still steaming hot. Without having a single sip of it, he hurled it onto the ground.

Jiang Cheng pulled a curt smile on his face, “... Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

Growing up, Jiang Cheng had seen Wei WuXian’s awful state countless times as he ran away from dogs. Others may have believed him if he denied it, but, in front of someone who knew him so thoroughly, it’d be impossible to argue. This was an obstacle harder to overcome than Zidian.

With a sincere tone, Wei WuXian replied: “I don’t know what to say to you.”

Jiang Cheng whispered: “You really don’t learn, do you?”

Ever since long ago, their conversations had been full of retorting and arguing. Wei WuXiang blurted out with thinking: “And you have not made any progress either...”

Jiang Cheng laughed from the anger, “Sure, then let’s see which of us is the one who hasn’t made any progress.”

Remaining seated at the table, he shouted in a commanding way. The dog stood up immediately!

Being in the same room as it already made Wei WuXian sweat in uneasiness. Seeing that the large, snarling dog closed in on him in less than a second, his ears were full of its low howls and

his entire body numbed. He had forgotten about much of his early years of wandering on the streets. The only things he still remembered was the terror he felt as he was chased by dogs and the slicing pain of teeth and claws digging into his flesh. The fear that had been planted deep within his heart couldn't be overcome or eased no how he tried.

Suddenly, Jiang Cheng glanced sideway at him, "Whose name did you call?"

Wei WuXian was in such a state of distress that he couldn't remember whether or not he called someone's name at all. He only managed to pull himself together after Jiang Cheng commanded the dog to back away. After a moment of hesitation, he abruptly turned his head away. On the other hand, Jiang Cheng left his seat. There was a whip attached beside his waist. With one hand on it, he bent down to look at Wei WuXian's face. After a pause, he straightened up and asked, "Speaking of it, since when have you been so close to Lan WangJi?"

Wei WuXian immediately understood whose name he had unconsciously called out.

Jiang Cheng smiled menacingly, "It really is quite curious how far he went to protect you, back on Dafan Mountain."

A moment later, he corrected himself, "No. You weren't necessarily the one whom Lan WangJi was protecting. After all, the GusuLan Sect couldn't have forgotten what you did with that loyal dog of yours. How could someone so celebrated for his righteousness tolerate the likes of you? Maybe he's familiar with this body that you stole instead."

His words were cruel and sinister. Every sentence seemed well-meaning on the surface, but was actually derogatory. Wei WuXian couldn't bear with it any longer, "Watch your language."

Jiang Cheng responded, "I've never cared for such things, don't you remember?"

Wei WuXian mocked, "Oh, right."

Jiang Cheng snorted, "So you think that you're qualified to make me watch my language. Do you still remember? Last time, on Dafan Mountain, did you watch your language when talking to Jin Ling?"

Wei WuXian's face stiffened.

Having regained the upper hand in the conversation, Jiang Cheng looked satisfied again. He sneered, "'I suppose that you didn't have a mother to teach you.' Now, you really know where it hurts the most, don't you? The person who caused Jin Ling to be criticized behind his back in

such a way is nobody else but you. You're quite the forgetful old man, aren't you? Have you forgotten the things you said and the promises you made? Then, do you still remember how his parents died?!"

Wei WuXian immediately raised his head, "I haven't forgotten! It's just that…"

Yet, he just couldn't find the right words to put after it.

Jiang Cheng interrupted, "It's just what? You can't say it? Don't worry, you can go back to Lotus Pier and say your excuses while kneeling in front of my parents' graves."

Wei WuXian calmed himself down and searched as fast as he could for a way out of the situation at hand. Although he had always dreamed of returning to Lotus Pier once more, he didn't want to go back to the tattered one nowadays!

Suddenly, a series of hurried footsteps approached, and the door was pounded on loudly. Jin Ling shouted from outside, "Uncle!"

Jiang Cheng raised his voice, "Didn't I tell you to stay where you were? Why did you come here?"

Jin Ling, "Uncle, I have something really important to tell you."

Jiang Cheng, "If there's something important, why didn't you decide to speak up when I was scolding you?"

"I didn't want to say it exactly because you kept on scolding me! Are you gonna listen or not? If not, I'm just not gonna say it!" Jin Ling replied in an angry voice.

Jiang Cheng opened the door with a fuming look on his face, "Tell me, then get out!"

As soon as the wooden door opened, Jin Ling stepped inside. He had already changed into a new set of the white uniform. "I really did encounter something troublesome today. I think I might have ran into Wen Ning!"

Jiang Cheng's brow twitched. With a hostile expression, he placed his hand on his sword at once, "Where? When?!"

Jin Ling told him, “It was this afternoon. There’s a worn-down house about a dozen miles south of here. I went because I heard that something strange had happened there, but who could have guessed that there was a fierce corpse hiding inside.”

Jing Ling’s word sounded quite believable. However, in Wei WuXian’s ears, all those sentences were nonsense. He knew precisely where Jin Ling was this afternoon. Moreover, if Wen Ning hid himself, unless he summoned him on purpose, there’d be no way that a junior would find him so easily.

Jiang Cheng, “Why didn’t you say so earlier?!”

Jin Ling, “I wasn’t certain. The corpse moved at a really fast speed and ran away as soon as I entered. I only saw a blurry figure. But I heard the chain noises he made on Dafan Mountain, which was why I suspected that it might have been him. If you didn’t scold me like that, I would have told you right after I came back. If he ran away and you can’t catch him, it’d be because of your bad temper, not me.” He still wanted to peek inside, but Jiang Cheng was so angered that he slammed the door right in front of his face. Through the closed door, Jiang Cheng shouted, “I’ll deal with you later. Get lost!”

Jin Ling replied with an “oh,” and his footsteps faded into the distance. Seeing Jiang Cheng turn around, Wei WuXian immediately pulled a mixed expression of “I’m so shocked,” “my secret has been disclosed,” and “what do I do now that Wen Ning had been found.” Jin Ling was actually quite clever. Knowing that Jiang Cheng hated Wen Ning more than anything, he made up such a smooth lie with the previous knowledge he had. Jiang Cheng knew that the YiLing Patriarch and the Ghost General often appeared together, so he already suspected that Wen Ning was in the area. Having heard Jin Ling’s words, he was already mostly convinced, and Wei WuXian’s expression convinced him even further. On top of that, he burst into fury whenever he heard the mention of Wen Ning’s name. With his eyes blinded by wrath, how could he still have doubted? The hostility that built in his chest was almost making him explode. He flicked his whip, hitting the ground beside Wei WuXian, and spoke through clenched teeth, “You really take this obeying dog of yours everywhere, don’t you?!”

Wei WuXian spoke, “He’s been dead since a long time ago, and I’ve died once as well. What else do you want?!”

Jiang Cheng pointed the whip at him, “So what? My hatred would persist, even if he dies thousands of times! He didn’t perish back then. Very well! I shall destroy him today, with my own hands. I’m going to burn him right now, and scatter his ashes right in front of your face!”

He slammed the door shut behind him and walked toward the main hall, ordering Jin Ling, “You keep a close eye on him. Don’t believe or listen to anything he says! Don’t let him make any sound. If he dares to whistle or play his flute, block his mouth first. If it doesn’t work, just slice off his hand or cut off his tongue!”

Wei WuXian knew that Jiang Cheng spoke these words especially for him to hear, threatening him against doing anything. The reason why Jiang Cheng didn’t bring him along was so that he didn’t use the opportunity to control Wen Ning. Jin Ling replied in a nonchalant tone, “I know. Of course I’ll be able to watch him. Uncle, why did you shut yourself inside along with that damn cut-sleeve? What did he do this time?”

Jiang Cheng answered, “This isn’t a question you should ask. Remember to watch him properly. If I return to see that he disappeared, I’ll break your leg for sure!” After a few more questions about the exact location, he left with half of the disciples and went to chase the nonexistent Wen Ning.

After some time of waiting, Jin Ling’s arrogant voice travelled through, “You go stand over there. You, go wait on the side. All of you go stand in front of the main entrance. I’m gonna go inside and meet him.”

None of the disciples dared to disobey. In a short while, the door had been opened again and Jin Ling stuck his head in, eyes darting around the room. Wei WuXian sat up straight. Jin Ling put a finger in front of his lips, walked in quietly, put his hand on Zidian, then whispered something.

Zidian could only work if it recognized its owner. Jiang Cheng had probably allowed it to recognize Jin Ling. The electric currents went out at once, and it transformed into a silver ring embedded with a purple crystal, lying on top of Jin Ling’s fair-colored palms.

Jin Ling said in a quiet voice, “Let’s go.”

After the senseless orders, the YunmengJiang Sect’s disciples had been scattered all over the place. The two stealthily flipped over the window and the walls. Having left the shop, they sprinted without making any noise. As they entered a forest, Wei WuXian heard something strange coming from behind him. Turning around, he was almost scared to death, “Why is it coming along as well?! Tell it to go away!”

Jin Ling whistled twice, and the dog rolled out its long tongue. Whimpering softly, its pointy ears twitched, and it ran away disheartenedly. Jin Ling sneered in contempt, “Such a loser. Fairy never bites. It just looks scary. It’s a spiritual dog trained to only bite evil beings. Did you really think that it’s just a regular dog?”

Wei WuXian, “Hold on. What did you call it?”

Jin Ling, “Fairy. Its name.”

Wei WuXian, “You named a dog something like this?!”

Jing Ling replied assuredly, “What’s wrong with this name? When it was younger, it was called Little Fairy. Now that it grew up, I can’t keep on calling it that.”

Wei WuXian refused, “No. No. No. The point isn’t whether it’s little or not! … Who in the world taught you such a way of naming?!” Without doubt, it must have been his uncle. In the past, Jiang Cheng also had a few puppies. The names he chose were things like ‘Jasmine’, ‘Princess’, ‘Love’, and so on, which sounded like the names of expensive girls in brothels. Jin Ling continued, “True men don’t care for such trifles. Why are you stressing over such details? Okay! Stop. Now that you offended my uncle, you’re already half dead. Now, I’m letting you go. We’re even.”

Wei WuXian asked, “Do you know why your uncle wants me?”

Jin Ling answered, “Yeah. He believes that you’re Wei WuXian.”

Wei WuXian thought, ‘3 @ , ’
He asked again, “Then, what about you? Don’t you suspect it as well?”

Jin Ling, “It’s not the first time my uncle did such a thing. He has never let any of them go, even if it was possible that he caught the wrong ones. But, if Zidian couldn’t draw out your spirit, I’m just gonna trust that you’re not. Besides, he wasn’t a cut-sleeve, but you even dared to harass…”

With a disgusted look, he stopped before mentioning who Wei WuXian harassed and made a fanning gesture as if he was shooing away flies. “Anyways, from now on, you have nothing to do with the LanlingJin Sect anymore! If you’re gonna go at it again, don’t find anyone from my sect! Or else, I won’t let you off!”

Having finished speaking, Jin Ling spun around to leave. After walking a few steps, he turned to him again, “What are you doing still standing there? Go. Are you waiting for my uncle to come and get you? Let me tell you—don’t think that I’ll be grateful just because you saved me. Don’t expect me to say anything cringe worthy either.”

Wei WuXian put his hands behind his back and walked over, “Young man, there are two cringe worthy phrases in one’s life that must be said, no matter what.”

Jin Ling asked, “Which two?”

Wei WuXian replied, “‘Thank you’, and ‘I’m sorry’.”

Jin Ling taunted, “What can anybody do to me if I don’t say them?”

Wei WuXian, “Someday, you’ll say those words in tears.”

Jin Ling made a spitting noise, just as Wei WuXian suddenly spoke to him, “I’m sorry.”

Jin Ling paused, “What?”

Wei WuXian, “I’m sorry for the words I said to you on Dafan Mountain.”

It wasn’t the first time that Jin Ling was told he had ‘no mother to teach him’, but it was the first time someone apologized to him in such a serious way. With an ‘I’m sorry’ shoved right into his face, he didn’t know why, but he suddenly felt a bit uneasy.

He wildly waved his arms around, “It’s nothing. You weren’t the first person to say so, anyways. It’s true that I had no mother to teach me. However, I won’t be inferior to anyone because of this! In fact, I’m gonna open you eyes and make you see that I am a lot stronger than all of you!”

Wei WuXian smiled. As he was about to speak, his expression suddenly changed, “Jiang Cheng? You!”

Jin Ling was already feeling guilty since he stole Zidian and let Wei WuXian go. Hearing the name, he whirled around to look. Using the chance, Wei WuXian hit Jin Ling’s neck, forming a blade with his hand. He laid Jin Ling flat on the ground, rolled up the bottom of his trousers, and examined the Curse Mark on his leg. He tried a few methods, but none of them made it fade. After a moment, he sighed, knowing that it’d be difficult.

However, although there were some curse marks that he was unable to remove, he could transfer them to his own body.

Jin Ling slowly woke up after a while. Putting his hand to his neck, some pain could still be felt. He was so angry that he jumped up and unsheathed his sword at once, “How dare you hit me! My uncle hadn’t even hit me before!”

Wei WuXian exclaimed, “Really? Doesn’t he say that he’ll break your legs all the time?”

Jin Ling fumed, “He’s only saying that! You damn cut-sleeve, what on Earth do you want? I…”

Wei WuXian covered his face and shouted toward behind Jin Ling, “Ah! HanGuang-Jun!”

Jin Ling was more scared of Lan WangJi than he was of his uncle. After all, his uncle was from his own clan, but HanGuang-Jun was from someone else’s. Frightened, he fled at once, shouting as he ran, “You damn cut-sleeve! Disgusting maniac! I’ll remember you! This is not over yet!”

Behind him, Wei WuXian laughed so hard that he couldn’t breathe. After Jin Ling disappeared into the distance, his chest itched in a stuffy way, and finally managed to stop the laughter after a while of coughing. Only then, did he have time to think.

Wei WuXian was taken home by Jiang FengMian when he was nine.

Most memories from back then were already blurred. Yet, Jin Ling’s mother, Jiang YanLi, remembered all of them, and even told him quite a few.

She said that, after his father heard of the news that his parents both died in battle, he had always dedicated himself to finding the child that these past friends had left behind. After searching for a while, he finally found the child in Yiling. The first time they met, Wei WuXian was kneeling on the ground, eating the fruit peels that somebody tossed on the ground.

Yiling’s winter and spring were quite cold, yet the child only wore thin layers. His knees were already tattered, and on his feet were two different shoes that didn’t fit at all. As he was looking down, searching for fruit peels, Jiang FengMian called him. He still remembered that there was a “Ying” in his name, so he lifted his head. Although his cheeks were both red and chapped from the cold, he still wore a smile.

Jiang YanLi said that he was born with a smiling look. No matter what unfortunate thing happened, he wouldn’t cling on to them; no matter what situation he was in, he would be happy. Although it sounded a bit heartless, it really wasn’t bad.

Jiang FengMian fed him a piece of melon, and he let Jiang FengMian carry him back. Back then, Jiang Cheng was also around eight or nine. He kept a few puppies to play with him in Lotus Pier. Finding out that Wei WuXian was extremely scared of dogs, Jiang FengMian suggested for Jiang Cheng to send the dogs away. Jiang Cheng was really unwilling. After throwing a tantrum of breaking things, pouting, and bawling his eyes out, he finally sent the dogs away.

Although, because of this, he held hostility toward Wei WuXian for a long time, after the two grew familiar, they had begun to cause mischief together. Whenever he ran into dogs, Jiang Cheng would always chase them away, then have a good laugh at Wei WuXian, who jumped onto a tree.

He had always thought that Jiang Cheng would be on his side, and Lan WangJi on the side opposite to him. He could never have imagined that things would turn out so differently.

Wei WuXian walked toward the rendezvous point that he and Lan WangJi were supposed to meet at. Nobody walked among the sparse lights that flickered in the night. Without having to look around, the white-robed figure stood at the end of the street, standing motionless with his head hung low.

Before Wei WuXian made any sound, Lan WangJi looked up and saw him. After some hesitation, he walked over with a darkened expression.

Wei WuXian didn't know why, but he involuntarily took a step backward.

He could almost see scarlet streaks of blood by the corners of Lan WangJi's eyes. He had to admit… Lan WangJi's face really did look quite scary.

Translator's Notes

Surprise! There are none!

Chapter 25 Malice—Part Three

However, having taken only one step back, his ankle twisted, and he seemed as if he almost collapsed on the ground. With a change in expression, Lan WangJi hurried over and tightly gripped his wrist like what he did last time, back in Dafan Mountain. After Wei WuXian had been steadied, Lan WangJi knelt down on one knee to examine his leg. Wei WuXian was rather shocked, “N-n-no, HanGuang-Jun. You don’t have to do this.”

Lan WangJi raised his head slightly, the pair of light-colored eyes boring into him, then looked down again and continued to roll up the leg of his trousers. Still under his grip, Wei WuXian could do nothing except to look up at the sky.

His entire leg was covered with the black bruise of the Curse Mark.

After staring at it for a while, Lan WangJi spoke in a bitter voice, “... I only left for a few hours.”

Wei WuXian shrugged, “A few hours is a long time. Anything could have happened. There, there. Straighten up.”

He backhandedly pulled Lan WangJi up, “It’s only the average Curse Mark. We can just kill it when it comes to find me. HanGuang-Jun, you’ll need to help me. If you don’t, I won’t be able to handle it. Have you caught the person? Is it him? Where is he now?”

Lan WangJi looked in the direction of a signboard that stood in front of a shop far down the street. Wei WuXian continued, “Let’s deal with the stone castle issue first.” He then walked toward the shop. He didn’t notice before, but his leg felt a bit numb, probably from Zidian. It was a good thing that Jiang Cheng controlled Zidian’s force so that he wasn’t made into a scorched corpse that had been struck by lightning.

Lan WangJi stood behind him. He suddenly called out, “* + .”

Wei WuXian’s figure paused. A second later, he pretended as if he didn’t hear the name, and answered, “What?”

Lan WangJi, “This was transferred from Jin Ling’s body, was it not.”

It wasn’t a question, but a statement.

Wei WuXian didn’t say anything. Lan WangJi spoke again, “You met Jiang WanYin.”

It wasn't hard to figure out due to the mark that Zidian left on top of the Curse Mark. Wei WuXian turned around, "As long as both of us are alive in this world, we'd meet for sure, sooner or later."

Lan WangJi, "Do not go..."

Wei WuXian, "If I don't go, how am I supposed to leave? Are you gonna carry me on your back or something?"

"..." Lan WangJi looked at him in silence. Wei WuXian's smile froze on his face, just as a foreboding feeling crossed his mind.

If it were the Lan Zhan from back then, he would definitely be shocked speechless by these words, and either leave with a cold face or completely ignore him. However, it'd be hard to say how the Lan Zhan now would respond. As he had expected, hearing these words, Lan WangJi walked in front of him, as if he really was going to bend down, kneel, and carry Wei WuXian on his back, despite his honorable status. Shock came upon Wei WuXian once more, "Stop, stop. I wasn't being serious. It's only numb because I got hit by Zidian a few times, not that it broke. It'd look bad for a full-grown man like me to be carried on somebody else's back."

Lan WangJi asked, "Would it look bad?"

Wei WuXian replied, "Would it look good?"

After a moment of silence, Lan WangJi responded, "But you have also carried me on your back before."

Wei WuXian, "Did such a thing ever happen? Why don't I remember?"

Lan WangJi answered in an indifferent tone, "You never remember such things."

Wei WuXian, "Everyone says that I have a bad memory. Alright, fine. Anyways, I'm not letting you carry me on your back."

Lan WangJi, "Are you sure?"

Wei WuXian replied in a resolute manner, "I'm sure."

The two stayed silent for a while. Suddenly, one of Lan WangJi's arms wrapped around his back and, as Lan WangJi bent down slightly, another went toward the back of his knees.

Wei WuXian was both shorter and lighter than him. Therefore, he was picked up easily, his body was embraced in a pair of firm arms. Wei WuXian didn't expect his answer to lead to this at all. Both in his past and current lives, it was the first time that he had been treated like this by anyone. He was horrified, "Lan Zhan!!!"

Carrying him, Lan WangJi both walked and replied to him steadily, "You said that you didn't want to be carried on my back."

Wei WuXian, "I didn't say that I wanted to be carried like this either."

Fortunately, it was already late into the night. There weren't any people walking on the streets, so it wasn't that embarrassing. Wei WuXian wasn't someone with a thin face either. Having been carried for a few steps, he quickly relaxed. He grinned as he played with the front of Lan WangJi's clothes, pretending to tug at it, "So you want to see whose face is thicker?"

The cold scent of sandalwood enveloped him. Without paying him attention, Lan WangJi looked straight forward and made no reaction, maintaining the righteous, serious expression. Seeing that nothing could affect him, Wei WuXian thought to himself as he continued to play with Lan WangJi's clothes, % 6 ,
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Wei WuXian asked, "Lan Zhan, you've known that it was me ever since we were at Dafan Mountain, right?"

Lan WangJi, "Yes."

Wei WuXian wondered, "How could you tell?"

Lan WangJi looked down at him, "You want to know?"

Wei WuXian declared, "Yes."

Lan WangJi, "You told me yourself."

Wei WuXian, "Myself? Because of Jin Ling? Because I summoned Wen Ning? None of these, right?"

It seemed as if something had sent ripples through Lan WangJi's eyes. Yet, the slight waves faded immediately, and his eyes were a still pool of water again.

He spoke in a serious tone, "Think."

Wei WuXian replied, "I only asked you because I can't think of the reason."

This time, no matter how he asked, Lan WangJi refused to answer. With Wei WuXian in his arms, he stepped into an inn. Aside from the front desk clerk who choked on some water, none of the bystanders acted strangely. As they arrived at the door of the room, Wei WuXian spoke, "Okay. We're here. It's time for you to let me down. You don't have a third hand to open the door…"

Before he finished his words, Lan WangJi did something that was extremely impolite. It was possibly the first time in his whole life that he had ever done such a rude act.

Carrying Wei WuXian, he kicked the door open.

The two doors sprang open, and the person who sat nervously inside instantly wailed, "HanGuang-Jun, I don't know, I don't know, I…"

After he realized in what posture the two of them came inside, he stared blankly at them, barely managing to finish the last sentence, "... I really don't know."

It really was the "Head Shaker".

Acting as if he didn't see anything, Lan WangJi carried Wei WuXian inside and put him on the bamboo mat. Nie HuaiSang's seemed as if he couldn't bear to look at the scene, and immediately opened his fan, covering his face with it. Wei WuXian walked around the fan to examine him. Even after so many years, his past classmate didn't bear many changes. He looked the same as he did back then. Although he was born with an elegant, attractive face, his expression made him seem as if one could do anything to him. His stylish outfit showed a fine taste in clothing, which meant that he definitely put plenty of thought into it. Compared to the leader of a sect, he further resembled a wealthy idler. Even if he wore an imperial robe, he wouldn't seem like a prince; even if he held a saber, he wouldn't seem like a cultivator.

He denied it no matter what, so Lan WangJi put the piece of fabric that the spiritual dog had bitten off onto the table. Nie HuaiSang felt for his sleeve that lacked a certain scrap, then replied miserably, "I just happened to pass by. I really don't know anything."

Wei WuXian, “If you don’t know, I’ll talk. As you listen to me, maybe you’ll figure that you do know some things after all.”

Nie HuaiSang opened and closed his mouth a few times, unable to provide a response. Wei WuXian proceeded, “In the area of Qinghe’s Xinglu Ridge, there have been rumors of the ‘Man-Eating Ridge’ and ‘Man-Eating Castle’, but there haven’t been any actual victims, which is why it’s mere hearsay. The hearsay would make it so that normal people avoid the Xinglu Ridge. Thus, its real function is to act as a defense line—the first one, in fact.

“If there’s a first, there must be a second. The second defense line is the walking corpses on the Xinglu Ridge. Even if someone who’s not scared of the Man-Eating Castle rumors either purposely or accidentally went inside the ridge, after they see the walking dead, they will definitely flee. However, these walking corpses are small in number and weak in terms of power, so they won’t cause any real harm.

“The third defense line is the maze array by the stone castle. The first two are to defend against normal people; only this one is to defend against cultivators. But, nevertheless, it only works against average cultivators. If a cultivator who holds a spiritual weapon or dog and specializes in maze arrays comes, or a cultivator as powerful as HanGuang-Jun, this defense line will have to be broken.

“The three defense measures exist in order for the stone castle on the Xinglu Ridge to remain hidden from the public. The identity of the people who built the stone castle is quite clear. This is the Nie Sect’s area. Aside from the Nie Sect, nobody else is capable of easily setting up these three obstacles in Qinghe. And, moreover, you happened to appear near the stone castle and leave evidence.”

“What exactly is the QingheNie Sect’s goal of building the Man-Eating Castle on the Xinglu Ridge? Where did the corpses in the wall come from? Were they eaten? Sect Leader Nie, if you don’t give us a proper explanation here, I’m afraid that, after the secret is exposed, all of the sects and clans come here to interrogate you. When the time comes, even if you want to explain things, there won’t be anyone to listen to or believe in you.”

Nie HuaiSang replied desperately, as if he had given up, “... It isn’t a Man-Eating Castle at all. It’s… It’s just my sect’s ancestral burial ground!”

Wei WuXian questioned, “Ancestral burial ground? Whose ancestral burial ground buries sabers instead of corpses?”

Nie HuaiSang responded with a sullen face, “HanGuang-Jun, before I explain things, can you promise me something? Seeing that our two sects have known each other for long and that our older brothers have sworn, no matter what I say after this, you… and the one beside you, must not tell anyone. If the secret is exposed in the future, I’d greatly appreciate it if the two of you can say a few good things as witnesses. You’ve always been true to your words. If you promise, I’ll believe you.”

Lan WangJi, “As you wish.”

Wei WuXian asked, “You said that it’s not a Man-Eating Castle after all, so does it mean that it hasn’t eaten anyone?”

Nie HuaiSang clenched his teeth and answered obediently, “... It has.”

Wei WuXian, “Wow.”

Nie HuaiSang immediately added, “But it was only once! And the one at fault wasn’t our sect, and it was dozens of years ago! The rumors of the Man-Eating Castle on the Xinglu Ridge also started since then. I… I only fanned the flames and magnified the rumors.”

Translator’s Notes

* + : In case anyone has forgotten (aka people like Addis the Editor), Wei Ying is Wei WuXian’s birth name. One’s birth name could only be called by a close friend/family member, or else it would have been considered rude. Lan WangJi calls Wei WuXian Wei Ying because they were classmates once.

Chapter 26 Malice—Part Four

Lan WangJi, “The details, please.”

Sitting down, his polite words were almost as powerful as a threat. Nie HuaiSang finally started his explanation.

He began, “HanGuang-Jun, you know that we, the Nie Sect, are different from the other sects. Because our sect’s founder was a butcher, the other sects cultivate using swords, while our sect, on the other hand, cultivates using sabers.”

This was known by everyone and was by no means a secret. Even the sect motif of the QinghеNie Sect was the vicious head of a beast that resembled a dog or a pig. Nie HuaiSang continued, “Because our cultivation method was different from those of the other sects’ and our founder was originally a butcher, it was only natural for blood to be shed. The sabers of our past sect leaders were all heavy with hostile energy and killing intent. Almost every single sect leader met a sudden death from a qi deviation explosion. Their irritable tempers also had a lot to do with this.”

Wei WuXian raised a brow, “Now, this is getting quite close to demonic cultivation.”

Nie HuaiSang quickly defended, “It’s different! Demonic cultivation is only demonic cultivation because it uses human lives. But, instead of human lives, our sect’s sabers use the lives of those evil spirits and beasts. Throughout their whole lives, they’ve been killing such things, so if they aren’t able to kill them any longer, they’d cause trouble and disrupt the sect. A saber spirit only deems one person as its master, allowing nobody else to use it. It’s not like we later generations can melt the sabers. First, it’d be disrespectful to the ancestors; second, it’s possible that even melting them won’t solve the problem.”

Wei WuXian commented, “Quite full of themselves, aren’t they?”

Nie HuaiSang, “Indeed. The sabers who fought and cultivated alongside our ancestors are indeed in a position to be full of themselves.”

He continued, “As the generations went on, the sect leaders had higher levels of cultivation, and the problem also worsened. That is, until the sixth sect leader came up with a solution.”

Wei WuXian asked, “To build the Man-Eating Castle?”

Nie HuaiSang, “No, no. Although they are connected, this solution only appeared later. The sixth sect leader did this: he built two coffins for his father’s and his grandfather’s sabers, then dug a tomb. Inside the tomb, instead of any valuable treasures, he put hundreds of corpses that were about to .”

Lan WangJi frowned slightly. Nie HuaiSang immediately blurted, “HanGuang-Jun, I can explain! They weren’t killed by our sect’s people! We had to gather them from place to place! We also bought a bunch of them at high prices. The sixth sect leader said that, if the saber spirits wanted to fight with evil beings, then give them evil beings for them to fight forever. The pre-transformation corpses were buried along with the sword-containing coffins, like they were burial goods for the saber spirits. The saber spirits would suppress the transformation of the corpses and, at the same time, the corpses would calm the sword spirits’ desire and fury. The situation would go on as they were, with the two sides keeping each other in check. Only by this method did the future generations attain peace.”

Wei WuXian asked again, “Then why was a stone castle built afterward? Why were the corpses buried inside the walls? And, didn’t you say that it did eat a few people?”

Nie HuaiSang answered, “These questions are actually the same question. I guess… you can say that it did eat people. But it wasn’t on purpose!!! Our sixth sect leader constructed the saber tomb in such a way that it looked like the average tomb, and the future generations followed how he did it. But, about fifty years ago, the tomb was dug up by some grave robbers.”

Wei WuXian made an “oh” sound. He silently exclaimed, "

Nie HuaiSang, “For an event as big as building a tomb, no matter how cautious and discreet one can be, it’s impossible for everything to stay hidden. The grave robbers pried into the matter and firmly believed that there was a huge tomb from past dynasties in the Xinglu Ridge. They planned this out a long time ago and came prepared. Among the unruly group of people, there were actually one or two who had true skills, allowing the mob to locate the orientation, pass the maze array, and find our saber tomb. They’ve seen enough dead people in their lives, so, after digging a hole and entering the tomb, they weren’t really scared of the corpses. But they searched everywhere for gold and treasures, breathing next to the corpses, and, even worse, they were youthful men in the prime of their lives, filled with yang energy. Remember, the corpses lying inside were all about to transform!

“It wasn’t hard to figure out what happened. Ten-or-so corpses transformed immediately.

“However, these grave robbers weren’t average people. With a complete set of tools, they actually managed to somehow kill the walking corpses once more. After the fight, there was flesh and blood all over the ground. They finally realized that the tomb was dangerous and got ready to leave. But, just as they were leaving, they were eaten!

“The number of corpses put in the tomb was strictly controlled. It was neither more, neither less, just enough to be at a balance with the saber spirits. It would’ve been fine if the grave robbers caused just the transformation, since, after they left, the saber spirits would’ve suppressed the transformation again. But, with the chaos they caused, the corpses were all cut to pieces, and so there were suddenly a few less corpses than it began with. For the saber tomb to ensure that there were enough fierce corpses and sword spirits to suppress each other, it… it could only… close itself off and trap them inside the tomb for the group to make up for the shortage they had caused.

“Since the saber tomb was destroyed, the sect leader at that time began to think of different methods. He chose another spot on the Xinglu Ridge and built a saber hall instead of a saber tomb. In case grave robbers came again, he hid the corpses inside the walls in disguise.

“The sword hall was the rumored ‘Man-Eating Castle’. When the grave robbers came to Qinghe, they pretended to be hunters. They never returned after going into the Xinglu Ridge and left no corpses behind, so people started to say that they were devoured by a monster in the ridge. Then, after the stone castles were built, before the new maze array was set up, a passerby accidentally came upon it again. Luckily, no doors were built on the castles, so he couldn’t venture inside. But, after leaving the ridge, he told everyone that there were a group of strange, white castles in the Xinglu Ridge and that the man-eating monster must have dwelled there. We thought that it’d be beneficial for the rumors to spread so that nobody dared to go near the area, so we exaggerated a bit and created the legend of the ‘Man-Eating Castle’. But it really can eat humans!”

Nie HuaiSang took out a handkerchief and a white stone the size of a garlic head from within his ' . He used the handkerchief to wipe away sweat and passed the white stone over, “The two of you can take a look at this.”

Wei WuXian took the stone. After having a better look at it, he found something white that protruded from the stone. It looked like… the bone of a human’s finger.

He immediately realized what was going on. Nie HuaiSang finished wiping his sweat and continued, “That… Young Master Jin… somehow made an explosion that created a hole in the wall. To be able to break such a thick wall must have meant that he also carried a lot of spiritual tools on him—but wait, that’s not the point… What I’m saying is that the area he blew up just

happened to be the earliest saber hall we built in the Xinglu Ridge. Back then, we didn't think of using stone bricks on the both sides and filling the center with soil to prevent yang energy from going in, so that they can't easily transform. We simply put the corpses inside. So, when Young Master Jin made the opening, he didn't realize that he also destroyed a skeleton that was buried inside. Before long, he was sucked into the walls of the castle, in place of the corpse that he blew up… Every so often, I go to the Xinglu Ridge to check things out. Today, when I went, I found this. Just as I picked up the stone, a dog came after me. Ah… The sword hall is pretty much our ancestral tomb. I really…"

The more Nie HuaiSang talked, the more miserable he felt, "Most cultivators know that this is our area, so they'd never night-hunt around Qinghe. Who knew that…"

Who knew that he had such bad luck. First, the disobedient Jin Ling had his mind set on the Xinglu Ridge, and then the two in search of where the ghost hand pointed, Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian, came as well. He spoke again, "HanGuang-Jun and you… I already said that you mustn't tell anyone else about this. Or else…"

Or else, seeing from the QingheNie Sect's half-dead situation right now, if this was released to the public, Nie HuaiSang would become a sinner, a disgrace to his ancestors even if he died. It was only natural that he'd rather be the secret laughingstock of all the sects instead of focusing on cultivation or daring to sharpen his saber's blade. If his cultivation reached a certain level, he would gradually become more irritable and, in the end, die with anger the same way that his brother and ancestors died. Even after his death, his sword would haunt the living and disrupt the peace of the whole sect. If so, being a worthless person even seemed better.

It was quite an unsolvable problem. Ever since the founder of the Nie Sect, this had been the same. Surely it didn't mean that the future generations would have to deny the path and basis that the founder forged? All of the cultivation sects were skilled in different areas. Similar to how the GusuLan Sect was skilled at music, the violence and power of the QingheNie Sect's saber spirits were how it outshone the other sects. If it abandoned its founder's ideal and started anew in search of a different path, who knew how many years it'd take, or if it'd even succeed or not. Moreover, Nie HuaiSang would never dare to betray the Nie Sect and cultivate a different path. Because of this, his only choice was to be a good-for-nothing.

If he weren't a sect leader and spent his whole life the same way as he did back in the Cloud Recesses, fooling around for entire days, he'd certainly be in a more comfortable position than he was now. But, since his brother had passed away already, no matter how hard it was for him, he'd still have to take the responsibility on his shoulders and stumble forward.

Nie HuaiSang left after telling them again and again not to say anything, and Wei WuXian blanked out for a while. Suddenly, he felt Lan WangJi walk over. Lan WangJi kneeled with a single leg in front of him, then proceeded to roll up his trousers with an earnest face. He hurriedly spoke, “Wait, again?”

Lan WangJi, “We will remove the Curse Mark first.”

Within one day, HanGuang-Jun had kneeled in such a way so many times in front of him. Although Lan WangJi looked quite serious, he really couldn’t bear to look at the scene. Wei WuXian spoke, “I’ll do it myself.” Quickly rolling up the trouser legs, he could see that the Curse Mark covered the entire lower half of his leg, passed his knees, and climbed onto the upper half. Wei WuXian took a glance at it, “It’s already passed my thighs.”

Lan WangJi turned his head away and did not answer. Wei WuXian found it quite odd, “Lan Zhan?”

Translator’s Notes

% : This refers to the turning of a normal corpse to a “walking corpse” or “fierce corpse”. If anyone calls this process “zombify” or these corpses “zombies” (such as the translator of Daomu Biji), I will send knives to their house.

' : In Ancient Chinese clothing, there were openings inside of sleeves for storing things.

Chapter 27 Malice—Part Five

Only then did Lan WangJi turn to the front again, gaze still slightly off to the side. Seeing this, Wei WuXian blinked his eyes, wanting to make fun of him for some reason. Just as he was about to tease Lan WangJi, a shattering sound suddenly came from by the desk.

They both stood up to look. The teacups and teapot broke to pieces on the ground. A 0 3 lay amid the white shards of porcelain and the tea that spilled out. The surface of the bag went up and down, as if something was trapped inside, eager to come out.

Although the Qiankun Pouch was only the size of a fist, it was specially made to store things. Complex incantations were also sewn on both the inside and the outside, adding a few more sealing layers. Lan WangJi originally sealed the arm inside the pouch and put it under a teacup on the table. Now, seeing its agitation, they finally remembered that it was time to perform : . If not for the short nightly duets they perform to calm it, no matter how strong the Qiankun Pouch's power of suppression was, it couldn't trap the ghost hand alone.

Wei WuXian felt for the bamboo flute that had been by his waist, but he found nothing. Turning around, he saw that Lan WangJi already had the flute in his hands. Lan WangJi's head tilted slightly downward. He only handed the flute back after carving on it for a while, in a dedicated manner. Taking the flute back, Wei WuXian noticed that, after it had been adjusted, even rough details such as the finger holes were much finer.

Lan WangJi, "Play it properly."

Remembering the horrible duet they played in the Mingshi that angered Lan QiRen to the point of waking up from a coma and fainting again, Wei WuXian laughed so hard that he almost fell on the ground, thinking to himself, "

He stopped himself from fooling around any longer and, with a serious expression, raised the flute to his lips. However, having only played a few notes, the Qiankun Pouch suddenly multiplied in size and stood upright on the ground!

A note cracked with a "tut". Wei WuXian commented, "Has it gotten too used to the bad playing? I'm playing properly for once, and it doesn't even like it."

As if replying him, the Qiankun Pouch flung itself at Wei WuXian. Lan WangJi's melody took a sharp turn. With one smooth gesture, the seven strings vibrated at once, emitting a noise so strong that it almost seemed like an avalanche. After the sound, the Qiankun Pouch fell backward to the ground again. As if nothing had happened, Wei WuXian continued playing. Lan

WangJi's wrist softened. Following the tune of : , the guqin's melody became calm once more, and gradually blended with the flute's.

The song finished, and the Qiankun Pouch finally shrunk to the size it had been, remaining motionless. Wei WuXian stuck the flute back by his waist, "In these few days, it's never looked as impatient as this before. It seems as if it was provoked by something."

Lan WangJi nodded and turned to him, "And, it was something on you."

Wei WuXian immediately looked downward at himself. Today, there was only one thing on him that was different—the Curse Mark that had been transferred to him from Jin Ling.

Jin Ling's Curse Mark was left on him when he was at the stone castles of the Xinglu Ridge. Seeing how strongly the ghost hand reacted to the Curse Mark, did it mean that…

Wei WuXian, "Do you mean that another part of his body might be within the walls of the Nie Sect's Saber Hall?"

On the next morning, the two departed again, heading back to the Xinglu Ridge.

Yesterday, Nie HuaiSang had been caught and confessed everything. Over the night, he called for all of the sect's reliable disciples to clean up the mess that the intruders created. When Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked over, the piece of wall that Wei WuXian dug Jin Ling out of had just been filled and a new corpse was already put inside. Watching the white bricks stack up neatly, he wiped some sweat off his brows. However, as he turned around, his legs almost gave out. He pulled a cringing smile onto his face, "HanGuang-Jun…and you…"

Wei WuXian waved his hands as he grinned, "Sect Leader Nie, you're building the walls?"

Nie HuaiSang wiped sweat away with his handkerchief, rubbing so many times that he almost took a layer of skin away, "Yes, yes…"

Wei WuXian said in a voice filled with much empathy and a dash of timidity, "My apologies. I'm really sorry for the inconvenience, but you might need to build the wall again afterwards."

Nie HuaiSang, "Yes, yes… What?! Wait!"

Before he could finish his sentence, Bichen unsheathed. Nie HuaiSang gaped as he watched the brick wall, which he repaired mere moment ago, crack open again.

Destruction was always easier than restoration. Wei WuXian's speed at taking bricks down was countless times faster than their speed at stacking bricks. Nie HuaiSang trembled as he tightly gripped his fan, feeling so wronged that he was on the verge of bursting into tears. Yet, since HanGuang-Jun stood on the side and commented nothing, he didn't dare to say anything either. After Lan WangJi explained the situation to him in a concise manner, he immediately swore to the Heavens and Earth, "Nonsense! That's utter nonsense! The corpses that our Saber Hall uses are all complete with each limb attached. It's impossible for there to be some armless male corpse. If you don't believe me, I'll take apart the wall with you and prove my innocence. But afterwards you must put them back as soon as possible, without any delay. After all, this is our ancestral burial ground…"

A few disciples of the Nie Sect also joined them. Now that there were other people doing the work, Wei WuXian backed off and stood on the side, waiting for results. After an hour, the stone bricks on the wall that Jin Ling had been buried in were mostly taken off. Some disciples put on face masks while others swallowed special red-colored pills, so that the breathing and human energy didn't cause corpse transformations. Among the black dirt, an ashen hand or a vein-laced foot sometimes poked out, in addition to the tangled, grimey hair plastered everywhere. Each and every male corpse was hastily cleaned and set row-by-row on the ground.

The corpses came in all shapes and sizes—some were already skeletons, some were in the process of rotting, some were still quite fresh. However, every single one of them had a complete body. They didn't find any male corpse that was missing a left arm.

Nie HuaiSang spoke warily, "Taking apart this one wall is enough, isn't it? Does any more need to be taken down? Probably not, right?"

It was indeed enough. The Curse Mark on Jin Ling's body was extremely dark in color, so the being that created it was most likely buried nearby him and the range would definitely not exceed this wall. Wei WuXian squatted down by a row of corpses. After pondering for a few moments, he turned to Lan WangJi, "Should we get the Qiankun Pouch?"

Taking the left hand out of the Qiankun Pouch for it to identify the body on its own wouldn't be a bad idea. However, if it was too close to the other limbs of the corpse, it'd be hard not to agitate it and trigger worse situations. And, due to the abundance of dark energy in this special location, the level of danger multiplied. This was why they carefully chose to come during daytime. Wei WuXian shook his head and thought to himself, 3

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Just as he was about to laugh at his own thought, Lan WangJi spoke again, "The legs."

With his reminder, Wei WuXian finally remembered. He overlooked the fact that the Curse Mark didn't spread any further than his legs. He quickly called, "Take off the pants! Take off the pants!"

Nie HuaiSang was shocked to death, "Why would you say such a shameful thing in front of HanGuang-Jun?"

Wei WuXian responded, "How was it shameful? We're all men, anyways. Help me take off all of the corpses' pants. Only the male corpses! This has nothing to do with the female ones." As he spoke, he started reaching out toward the belt sashes of the corpses on the ground. It really was unfortunate for Nie HuaiSang. He didn't expect at all that, after confessing everything yesterday, today, he needed to take off the corpses' pants right inside the Saber Hall of his ancestors. Moreover, they were male corpses. With a face full of tears, he thought that, for sure, after he died, he would be slapped once on the face by every ancestor in the QinghеNie Sect and end up injured so badly that he'd be handicapped even after he reincarnated. Luckily, Wei WuXian's act was stopped by Lan WangJi. Just as Nie HuaiSang was about to praise how worthy of his title HanGuang-Jun was, he heard him speak, "I will do it."

Wei WuXian, "You'll do it? You're really going to do such a thing?"

The corners of Lan WangJi's brows seemed to be twitching slightly, as if he was holding something back. He repeated, "Do not move. I will do it."

This was the worst of all the shocks Nie HuaiSang experienced today.

Of course, Lan WangJi wouldn't actually use his hands to pull on the corpses' pants. He simply used Bichen and lightly sliced open the clothing on the corpses, revealing the skin inside. This wasn't needed for some of the corpses, as the clothes were already quite ragged. A few moments later, he spoke up, "I found it."

Everyone immediately looked toward the ground. On both thighs of the corpse beside Lan WangJi's white boots, there were two light, circular marks. The stitches of the flesh-colored threads were tightly sewn around. There was a faint difference between the colors of the skin above and below the stitches. Clearly, the legs and upper body of the corpse didn't belong to the same person.

This pair of legs was sewn on by someone!

Nie HuaiSang was already shocked speechless. Wei WuXian inquired, “Who chooses the corpses that the Nie Sect uses for the Saber Hall?”

Nie HuaiSang replied with a glazed expression, “Usually, the past sect leaders chose and stored them when they were still alive. My brother passed away at an earlier age. He didn’t have enough, so I also helped him choose some… I kept whichever corpses that were complete with all limbs. I don’t know about anything other than this...”

It’d be impossible to get anything out of him as to who exactly sneaked the corpse inside. From the people who provided the corpses to the disciples of the Nie Sect, there were countless suspects. It was likely that the truth would be revealed only if they found all body parts and pieced the corpse and soul together.

Finally having managed to separate the pair of legs and the other half of the male corpse, Wei WuXian put them inside a new Qiankun Pouch as he spoke to Lan WangJi, “Looks like our dear friend here was cut to pieces. And, not only that, the parts were scattered all over the place—one piece here, one piece there. Just how much hatred did the murderer hold for him? We can only hope that the pieces aren’t too tiny.”

Although Nie HuaiSang still said “see you” when they set off, judging from his frightened face, he most likely didn’t want to see them ever again for the rest of his life. The two left the Xinglu Ridge and returned to the inn. Upon arriving at the relatively safe place, they took out the three limbs and started to examine them. As they had expected, the pair of legs were of the same color as the severed arm. And, if they were put close together, they would react strongly, vibrating nonstop as if they wanted to join together. But the efforts were useless, as there was still one part of the body between them that was missing. It was certain that they belonged to the same person.

Aside from the fact that this was a man with a tall physique, long limbs, a muscular body, and a high level of cultivation, they knew nothing else about the mysterious corpse. Fortunately, the ghost hand soon pointed at where the next step would take place—the Southwest.

Following its direction, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi made their way to Yueyang.

Translator’s Notes

0 3 : This was called the Qiankun Bag in past chapters, but now it has been changed to Qiankun Pouch because it is more suitable for its size.

Chapter 28 Dew—Part One

After entering the city, the two walked side-by-side through the bustling crowd. All of a sudden, Lan WangJi asked, “How is the Curse Mark?”

Wei WuXian, “Jin Ling was buried too close to our dear friend and got stained with quite a lot of resentful energy. It faded a bit, but it’s not completely gone. The chances are we can only find a way to remove it after we find the whole corpse or at least the head. It doesn’t really cause much trouble anyways.”

The “dear friend” was none other than the man that had been cut to pieces. Since they didn’t know who he was, Wei WuXian suggested that they referred to him as a “dear friend”. Lan WangJi didn’t say anything after hearing it, but he didn’t object to it either, which could be interpreted as a silent approval. Of course, he himself wouldn’t ever use the word.

Lan WangJi, “How much is ‘a bit’?”

Wei WuXian indicated with his hands, “A bit is just a bit. How do I explain it? Should I take my clothes off and show you?”

Lan WangJi’s brows shifted slightly, as if he was actually worried that Wei WuXian would strip right here and right now. He replied with an indifferent tone, “Take them off after we return.”

Wei WuXian laughed, whirled around, and walked a few steps facing backward. Before, in order to escape as soon as possible, he desperately tried to disgust others, from feigning madness to purposely losing face. Now that his identity was revealed, if he were anyone else, he would’ve felt extremely ashamed remembering all those things he did. Only someone with a face as thick as Wei WuXian would carry on as if he wasn’t involved in anything. Speaking of it, if he were anyone else with at least some face, he would never have done ridiculous things such as climbing into someone’s bed at night, insisting on sharing a together, and asking if he looked pretty after putting on makeup. Since he pretended that he didn’t remember anything, Lan WangJi naturally refrained from bringing up the subject, the two acting as if nothing had happened. Today was the first time he made such a joke again after his identity was no longer a secret. When he finished laughing, Wei WuXian immediately put on a serious face, “HanGuang-Jun, do you think that the people who set our dear friend’s hand in Mo Village and made it attack your juniors, and the people who sewed his legs on another corpse and buried them in the wall, are the same group of people?”

Both in the past and the present, in his mind, he directly called Lan WangJi by his first name, but he got used to the last few days of calling him by his . Besides, him calling this name created a tone of exaggerated seriousness, sounding unexplainably funny. Thus, when they were outside, he continued to call him in such a semi-earnest way.

Lan WangJi, “There are two groups.”

Wei WuXian, “Well, I agree. Taking such pains to sew the legs to another corpse and hide them in a wall obviously meant that they didn’t want the limbs to be discovered. If so, they wouldn’t have purposely tossed out the left hand to attack the GusuLan Sect’s people, since it would definitely have caused attention and investigation. One went to great lengths to hide everything, while the other attacked rashly, almost as if it wanted to be discovered. They’re probably not the same group of people.”

Everything that needed to be said had been said. Lan WangJi seemed like he didn’t have anything else to say anymore, but responded with an approving “ ” anyway.

Wei WuXian turned around, speaking as he walked, “The people who hid the legs knew about the QingheNie Sect’s Saber Hall tradition, while the people who let the left hand loose knew about the GusuLan Sect’s plans. I don’t think any of them have simple intents. There are more and more secrets.”

Lan WangJi, “One step at a time.”

Wei WuXian, “How did you recognize

me?” Lan WangJi, “Think for yourself.”

Questions and answers passed quickly between them, without even a moment of rest. Wei WuXian originally wanted to wait until Lan WangJi was not paying attention and make him blurt out the answer to the last question. Even though he still didn’t succeed, he wasn’t discouraged at all and continued to switch the topics of their conversation at a quick pace, “I’ve never been to Yueyang. Before, I’ve always had other people to inquire about things for me. This time, I’m gonna take a break and you can go ask around. Would you mind, HanGuang-Jun?”

Lan WangJi turned around and got going at once. Wei WuXian immediately interrupted, “Wait. HanGuang-Jun, may I ask where you’re going?”

Lan WangJi looked back, “To find the cultivational sect of this area.”

Wei WuXian tugged at his l and dragged him in the opposite direction, “Why would you find them? This is their area; even if they know, they wouldn’t tell you. They either couldn’t deal with it and hid it so that they didn’t lose face, or tried as hard as they could since they didn’t want other people to meddle with things. My honorable HanGuang-Jun, it isn’t that I want to purposely shame you, but you really can’t do without me when handling things outside. If you ask around in such a manner, I’d be surprised if you actually managed to get results.”

Although these words were a bit rude, tenderness pooled within Lan WangJi’s eyes. Again, he spoke in a low voice, “Mnn.”

Wei WuXian laughed, “What did you ‘mnn’ for? That’s not how you should’ve responded.” Meanwhile, in his heart, he commented gleefully, ( ) "
, $

Lan WangJi, “Then, how should I ask?”

Wei WuXian pointed to the side, “Go over there, of course.”

He pointed toward a wide street. Bright red banners of all shapes and sizes hung on both sides of the street, fluttering in the wind. Every single shop opened its doors widely, with round, black jars placed from within to outside the entrance. There were also waiters holding trays of small / , recommending their shops to the passerby.

The strong scent of liquor drifted throughout the street. No wonder Wei WuXian walked slower and slower. He stopped altogether when they arrived at the next street corner, and even dragged Lan WangJi to a halt.

Wei WuXian put on a serious face, “The waiters here are usually young and hardworking. With so many customers a day and so many mouths spreading gossip, nothing strange going on around the area would escape their ears and eyes.”

Lan WangJi replied with a “mnn”, but it was written all over his face that “you just want to have a few drinks, don’t you?”

Wei WuXian pretended as if he couldn’t understand Lan WangJi’s expression. Continuing to pull on the other’s sword tassel, he stepped into the street of liquor shops with beaming eyes. At once, the waiters from five or six different shops came over, each more enthusiastic than the next, “Would you like a taste? The He family’s liquor is well-known all around the area!”

“Young Master, have a taste of this. You don’t have to pay. If you enjoyed the liquor, then come to our shop.”

“This one doesn’t smell strong, but wait until you drink it up!”

“If you can still stand after you finish this, I’ll adopt your surname!”

Hearing this, Wei WuXian responded, “Very well!” He took over the liquor bowl that waiter held, drank it up, and showed him the emptied bowl with a grin, “Adopt my surname?”

Surprisingly, the waiter wasn’t scared. Sticking his chin up, he looked even more confident, “I meant if you drink a whole jar!”

Wei WuXian, “Then, give me… three jars.”

The waiter was more than delighted and rushed back inside the shop. Wei WuXian turned to Lan WangJi, “We're doing business here, aren’t we? First we help their business, then we talk about other things. After we pay, it’ll be easy to get them talking.”

Lan WangJi took out money to pay.

The two walked inside the shop. Inside, there were wooden tables and chairs for the customers to rest and chat. One of the other waiters in the shop saw how Lan WangJi looked and figured that he wasn’t the average person. Not daring to slight him, he only directed them to a table after he wiped the table and chairs for a long while. With two jars by his foot and another in his hand, Wei WuXian chatted with the waiter for a few moments, then cut to the chase, asking again for any strange things that had happened in the area. The waiter was also a talkative person. He rubbed his hands together, “What sort of strange things?”

“Haunted houses, deserted cemeteries, corpses that were cut apart and so on.”

The waiter’s eyes darted back and forth between them, “Hmm… What do you do for a living? You and him.”

Wei WuXian, “Haven’t you guessed it already?”

The waiter understood, “Of course. It’s easy to guess. You two must be one of those cultivators who fly around in the clouds and Heavens. Especially the one next to you. Among average folks, I’ve never seen such a… such a…”

Wei WuXian grinned, “Such a pretty person.”

The waiter laughed, “If you say this, the young master next to you will be displeased. Strange things, wasn’t it? They did happen. Not now, but ten years ago. Walk in this direction. After you leave the city, walk for around two miles, and you’d see quite a lovely residence. I don’t know if their signboard is still there or not. It’s the Chang Clan’s residence.”

Wei WuXian, “What’s wrong with the residence?”

“The entire clan died!” The waiter said, “You asked for strange things, so of course I’m telling you the strangest of things. The entire clan was wiped out, and I heard that they were frightened to death!”

Hearing this, Lan WangJi was absorbed in thought, appearing as if he remembered something. On the other hand, Wei WuXian didn’t notice anything, “Is there any cultivational sects stationed around the area?” It must have been an extremely cruel being if it was able to frighten all members of an entire clan to death. Not every sect was like the QinghеNie Sect, having difficulties that it couldn’t mention. Most sects would never tolerate the appearance of something like this in their area. The waiter replied, “Yes. Of course there is.”

Wei WuXian, “Then how did they deal with the situation?”

“Deal with the situation?” The waiter swung the cleaning rag onto his shoulder and also sat down, revealing the secret that he had been keeping in for so long, “Young Master, do you know what the surname of the cultivational sect in Yueyang was? It was Chang. The clan who died was their ! If everyone died, who would there be to deal with the situation?”

The Chang Clan that was wiped out had been the cultivational sect stationed in this area?!

Wei WuXian had never heard of some YueyangChang Sect before, meaning that it definitely wasn’t a prominent sect, but the fact that a whole clan had been wiped out was definitely a significant event. He immediately asked, “How was the Chang Clan wiped out?”

The waiter, “This is what I’ve heard. One night, the noise of slamming on doors suddenly came from the Chang Clan’s residence.”

Wei WuXian, “The noise of slamming on doors?”

“That’s right! The slamming was so loud that it almost reached the Heavens. In it, there came screams and cries as if everyone was locked inside, unable to come out. Strange, isn’t it? The

door was bolted from within, so if you were on the inside and you wanted to get out, you could've just just opened it. Why would you slam on the doors? Even if you slam on them, the people outside wouldn't be able to get you out. Besides, if you couldn't get out from the doors, couldn't you climb over the walls?

"The people outside were quite confused. Everyone knew that the Chang Clan was very powerful in the area because the people there cultivated. The head of their clan, Chang Ping, I think, had a sword that could fly and have him stand on it as it flew! Say, something really happened inside and even his own clan couldn't take care of it, if ordinary people went over, wouldn't they have been searching for their own deaths? This was why nobody built any ladders or climbed over the walls to peek inside. Just like this, the night passed, and the wailing inside grew quieter and quieter. On the next day, as the sun came out, the doors of the Chang Clan opened on their own.

"Within the house, among the men and women, ten-or-so masters, and a few dozens of servants, some sat, some lay, vomiting their bladders out. All of them were frightened to death."

The owner of the liquor shop turned around and scolded, "! gonna die! Why are you not doing work and telling old tales about people dying?"

Wei WuXian, "Five more jars, please."

Lan WangJi paid the price for ten jars. The owner beamed at once, warning the waiter, "Look after the customers properly. Don't go running around!"

Wei WuXian, "You can continue."

Without anything else to worry about, the waiter tried as hard as he could and continued the story in an animated voice, "After then, for a long time, anyone who walked by the Chang Residence at night could hear the noises of slamming on walls coming from the inside!

"Think about it. People like them who fly in the skies have seen countless ghosts and monsters before, yet they were frightened to death. How frightening would that have had to be? If you're often out at night, you'd definitely bump into some ghosts. Even after they were buried, you can hear them slamming on their coffins! Although the head of their clan, Chang Ping, was away from home and survived…"

Wei WuXian, "Didn't you say that the whole clan died?"

Translator's Notes

: The bathtub here refers to a large, wooden bucket that was used in Ancient China for bathing purposes. It'd be quite cramped in there if two people bathe together.

% : This used to be called an "alternative name". It will now be changed to "title" as it seems more suitable.

l: Sword tassels are tassels hung on the swords' hilts, mostly for decorative purposes. They come in all kinds of color, but Lan WangJi's is probably white.

) : When reading out loud in your head, do not imagine a moaning sound. This serves a similar purpose as "mhm/uh-huh".

/ : They look flatter and are shallower than the average cups. This image shows common sizes of liquor bowls: https://cbu01.alicdn.com/img/ibank/2014/633/677/1834776336_1727173324.jpg (from left to right: 50 ml, 75 ml 100 ml, and 150 ml). Also, a small jar of liquor holds around a half to one whole liter, while a large jar can hold up to five liters. In this case, the shop is most likely selling smaller jars.

: To recap (in case anyone forgot), a clan is the family descending from the founder of the sect. In this case, "clan" is used instead of "sect" because the Chang Clan is quite small in size, which meant that it probably didn't have any outer disciples/disciples from foreign sects.

Chapter 29 Dew—Part Two

The waiter, “Take it easy. I was just about to mention that. Everyone did die. Although I said that he survived, it was only for a short while. After a few years, the clan’s head, Chang Ping, died as well. This time, the death was even more horrifying. He was killed by lingchi with a sword! I don’t need to tell you what lingchi is, do I? It’s when the flesh on someone’s body is piece by piece sliced off with a saber or a sword for three thousand and six hundred times, until all of the flesh is gone and there’s only a skeleton left...”

Of course, it was impossible for Wei WuXian not to know what lingchi was. If somebody wanted a book called # 3 = # 7 = , he’d have been the person who was most qualified to write it. He raised a hand, “I understand. Then, do you know why the Chang Clan was wiped out?”

The waiter, “I heard that it was planned by another cultivational sect. That’s for sure, right? Or else, why did a bunch of people who could cultivate fail to escape? They were definitely trapped inside by something or someone.”

In case the conversation wasn’t going well, the owner of the shop even brought over two side dishes of peanuts and sunflower seeds. Wei WuXian nodded in acknowledgement, and continued while eating sunflower seeds, “Did anyone find out what exactly the something or someone was?”

The waiter laughed, “Young Master, now you’re just joking. How could we ordinary people who are just trying to get through life know anything about those who fly around in the skies? Logically, you guys should know more than me since you all cultivate. I’ve only heard some vague talk of of how they offended someone whom they shouldn’t have! Anyways, after that, nobody was left in charge of the evil beings around Yueyang.”

Wei WuXian pondered, “Somebody whom they shouldn’t have offended?”

“That’s right.” The waiter ate two peanuts, “These sects or whatever indeed hold grudges against the others. I’m thinking that the Chang Clan must have been targeted by the other cultivators. Isn’t killing people for the sake of treasures common or something? Those books all said so. Tales and legends as well. Although I don’t know who exactly did it, it was apparently related to a very famous villain.”

Wei WuXian smiled as he lifted the liquor bowl to his lips, glancing sideways at him, “Let me guess. You’re gonna say that you don’t know who the villain was?”

The waiter cracked up, “Guess again. I definitely know this one. He was called something along the lines of ‘peculiar’… Right, ‘patriarch’. The YiLing Patriarch!”

Wei WuXian choked, letting out a series of bubbles into the liquor bowl with a splash, “What?”

Him again?!

The waiter confirmed, “Yep, that’s right! His surname was Wei. He’s called * * 0 , I think. People sound both hateful and scared when they mention him.”

“...”

Wei WuXian thought over it and determined two things—One: He had never been to Yueyang before, and two: Among all of the people he had killed, none of them died by lingchi. He felt that this was a bit absurd and looked over at Lan WangJi, as if he wanted an explanation. Lan WangJi had been waiting for this look since quite a while ago. He replied, “We are leaving.”

Wei WuXian immediately understood. Lan WangJi had something to say to him and it couldn’t be said in the liquor shop, under everyone’s noses. He stood up, “Then let’s leave. How much… Right, it’s been paid already. I’m leaving the liquor here for now. I’ll continue drinking after we finish.” He added, half-jokingly, “Make sure it’s still here when I get back.”

Having already finished more than half of the plate of peanuts, the waiter responded, “Of course! Our shop is honest to everyone, from the old to the young. Leave ‘em here and don’t worry.
We’ll wait until you come back to close our shop. Hey, Young Masters, are you going to the Chang Residence right now? Whoa, now that’s pretty cool—I’m from the area and I haven’t even been there! I’ve only dared to sneak a few looks at it from far away. Are you two going inside? What are you going to do?”

Wei WuXian, “We’re also just gonna sneak a few looks, from far away.”

The young waiter had an outgoing personality, getting friendly with strangers a bit too quickly. Although they only chatted for a short while, he was already treating Wei WuXian as if they were friends. He came over to put his arm around Wei WuXian’s shoulder, “Is the work that you two do hard? Do you earn lots of money? Probably a ton, right? What a respectable job. Let me ask you something—is it difficult to get started? I…”

As he babbled, he suddenly shut his mouth, nervously looking to the side. He whispered, “Young Master, why is the one beside you… staring at me?”

Wei WuXian followed his gaze just to see Lan WangJi turn around, stand up, and walk outside the liquor shop, “Oh, him. This friend of mine was brought up strictly. He absolutely hates it when other people are being too comfortable with each other in front of him. Isn’t that strange?”

The waiter awkwardly took away his arm, replying in a hushed voice, “Strange indeed. The way he looked over, you’d think that I was putting my arm around his wife...”

With Lan WangJi’s hearing ability, it was impossible for him to not catch something just because it was with a lowered voice. Imagining how he’d feel right now, Wei WuXian tried so hard not to laugh that his stomach hurted. He quickly said to the waiter, “I finished a jar.”

The waiter, “I’m sorry?”

Wei WuXian pointed at himself, “I’m standing.”

Finally recalling the “if you can still stand after you finish this, I’ll adopt your surname” that he said earlier, he blurted out, “Oh… Ohhh! Uhm… Wow! I’m not kidding, but this is my first time seeing someone who can still stand and speak properly after downing a jar. Young Master, what’s your surname?”

Wei WuXian, “My surname…” Suddenly remembering the “Wei WuQian” that the waiter mentioned, the corners of his lips twitched. He smoothly transitioned, “Is Lan.”

The waiter was also someone with a thick face, announcing without any change of expression, “Yes. From today on, my surname will be Lan!”

Under the bright-red banners of the liquor shop, it seemed as if, for one second, Lan WangJi’s figure stumbled ever so slightly. With a mischievous smile on his face, Wei WuXian walked over with his hands behind his back and patted his shoulder, “HanGuang-Jun, to thank you for paying the bill, I made him adopt your surname.”

After they left the city, the two walked in the direction of where the waiter pointed at. The number of people gradually decreased, while the number of trees increased. Wei WuXian asked, “Back then, why did you not let me continue asking him?”

Lan WangJi, “I suddenly remembered hearing about what happened in Yueyang. There was no need to continue asking.”

Wei WuXian, “Before you tell me, let me ask you something. Confirm for me that the, uh, wiping out of the Chang Clan wasn’t done by me, was it?”

Other than how he died ten years ago and his soul had been fairly stable, it was impossible that he killed an entire clan and didn’t remember anything!

Lan WangJi, “No.”

Wei WuXian, “Oh.”

It was as if he returned to those days, before he died, of being even worse than a sewer rat, despised by everyone. He played a role in everything; he was to be blamed for everything. Even if one’s neighbor’s grandson didn’t eat properly and lost five pounds, it was because the child was frightened by stories of the YiLing Patriarch commanding the Ghost General to murder people.

However, Lan WangJi spoke again, “The killing was not done by you, but it was related to you.”

Wei WuXian, “What’s the relationship?”

Lan WangJi, “There are two relationships. First, one of the people who were connected to it shared a past with your mother.”

Wei WuXian stopped in his tracks.

He didn’t know what he was feeling at the moment or how his face looked. Pausing for a moment, he spoke, “... My mother?”

Wei WuXian was the son of Wei ChangZe, a servant of the YunmengJiang Sect, and ZangSe (, a ' . Both Jiang FengMian and his wife, Yu ZiYuan, were quite familiar with Wei WuXian’s parents. Despite this, Jiang FengMian never reminisced about his old friend in front of Wei WuXian and, moreover, Yu ZiYuan never spoke properly to Wei WuXian at all. It was lucky for him if she didn’t give him a few whips and send him to kneel in the ancestral hall so that he’d keep his distance from Jiang Cheng. Other people told him most of the things he knew about his parents. He really didn’t know much more than what everyone else knew.

Lan WangJi also halted, turning around to look at him, “Have you heard of the name ‘Xiao XingChen’?”

Wei WuXian searched through his memories, “No.”

Lan WangJi, "'No' is correct. He was well-known when he left the mountain twelve years ago. Now, nobody mentions him."

Twelve years ago just happened to be one year after the siege at YiLing's LuanZang Hill, which meant that he only just missed it. Wei WuXian asked, "What's the mountain? Who taught him?"

Lan WangJi, "I do not know which mountain it was. His was taught by a cultivator. Xiao XingChen was a pupil of BaoShan SanRen."

Wei WuXian finally understood why Lan WangJi said that this person shared a past with his mother, "So, that mean's Xiao XingChen is my ."

ZangSe SanRen was also a pupil of BaoShan SanRen.

BaoShan SanRen was a cultivator who lived secluded from the rest of the world, rumored to be of the same generation as Wen Mao and Lan An. Most of the heroes from that generation had already returned to dust, yet BaoShan SanRen was said to have still remained unfallen. If it really was so, then she must be hundreds of years old and have quite a high level of cultivation. Back then, with the lead of Wen Mao, the cultivation world focused on the rise of clans instead of sects, and cultivational forces connected by blood ties rose as if they were bamboo shoots after a spring rain. Without exception, every cultivator who was slightly famous chose to found a sect. Yet, this cultivator decided to retire into solitude, living in a mountain under the ' of SanRen. Nobody knows, though, which mountain she was embracing. Speaking of it, it was only called retiring into solitude because nobody knew. If after one retired into solitude, they could still be found easily, it wouldn't be called retiring into solitude anymore.

She lived in an unknown and would often secretly take abandoned children up the mountain to be her pupils. However, all of the pupils had to vow that they would devote their whole lives to cultivation, never leaving the mountain or entering human society. Or else, no matter what the reason was, they were never to go back again. They'd need to depend on themselves to survive in the mortal world, cutting all ties with their teacher.

Everyone spoke highly of BaoShan SanRen for her foresight in setting this rule. This was because, during the few hundreds of years, only three of her pupils left the mountain—YanLing (, ZangSe SanRen, and Xiao XingChen. Of these three pupils, none died a peaceful death.

Wei WuXian knew about the fates of the first and second pupils ever since he was young, so no further explanations were needed. Thus, Lan WangJi told him the stories of the last pupil, his shishu.

When Xiao XingChen left the mountain, he was only seventeen. Lan WangJi had never met him in person, but he had heard about Xiao XingChen's talent from others.

At that time, the Sunshot Campaign only finished a few years ago and the siege at Yiling's Luanzang Hill had just ended. All of the prominent sects were recruiting qualified cultivators from all around to be part of them. Xiao XingChen left the mountain in hopes of saving the world. With his excellent talent and capable teacher, during his first night-hunt, he held a in one hand and a long sword in the other, entering the mountain alone and claiming first place—he became famous overnight.

As the sects saw such a bright, gifted cultivator at such a young age, they all invited him to their sects. Yet, Xiao XingChen turned down all of the offers. He said that he didn't want to depend on any sects, but he wanted to build a new sect with a close friend that didn't value a bloodline.

He had a soft personality but a solid heart, gentle on the outside but determined on the inside. Whenever someone had a difficult matter at hand, the first thing they thought of was to find him for help. As a person of moral integrity, he never refused either, which was why people often spoke of him with appraisal.

That was around when the wiping out of the Yueyang Clan happened.

Translator's Notes

* * 0 : WuXian means "no envies", while WuQian means "no money".

(' : A rogue cultivator is a cultivator who doesn't belong to any sects and cultivates alone.

(: This pretty much means "rogue cultivator", but it has been kept as pinyin to maintain the flow of the story.

: Similar to shidi and shijie, shishu is used by someone to refer to their "disciple uncle", their mother's shidi.

' : This is just another type of name. It's not important at all, so don't panic because of how "oh my god they already have three to four names and here comes another".

: This literally translates as "to embrace a mountain".

: This refers to a mountain, but more celestial/spiritual there, allowing cultivators to absorb more of the energy there and reach higher levels faster.

(: Similar to SanRen, this just means "cultivator".

: A horsetail whisk is often used by cultivators or Daoists in general. It has a variety of meanings and those meanings will not be important. Just understanding that it's probably white in color and makes Xiao XingChen look like a white lotus should be enough.

Chapter 30 Dew—Part Three

One day, the Yueyang Clan's leader went out night-hunting with a few family members for about half a month. In the middle of the night, without any warning, they received the bad news and immediately hurried back. After the mourning, they only found out that someone purposely destroyed their protective array and let in a group of powerful evil spirits. Other than that, they knew nothing.

In most cases, only few people knew about the tragedies that happened in smaller clans, but the circumstances back then were different. The Sunshot Campaign finished long ago, while the siege at Luanzang Hill only just ended. On the surface, the situation seemed rather stable. With the sudden disclosure of this event, the entire cultivation world was bubbling with discussion, some even exaggerating that it was the revenge of the revived YiLing Patriarch, Wei WuXian. However, there wasn't any evidence, so it had been impossible to find the killer. Of course, Xiao XingChen didn't sit back and do nothing. He volunteered to be responsible for the matter and find out the truth for Chang Ping. After a month, the murderer was finally discovered.

The murderer's name was Xue Yang.

Xue Yang was even younger than Xiao XingChen, nothing more than just a boy. Despite this, he definitely didn't tone down on his cruelty just because he was young. Ever since the age of fifteen, he had been a delinquent in the area of Kuizhou, known far and wide for his radiant smile, inhumane means, and merciless personality. Everyone's expressions changed whenever he was brought up in a conversation. When he was a child dwelling in the streets, it was said that he developed a hatred that lasted for years toward Chang Ping's father. He committed this crime in vengeance and for some other reasons.

After Xiao XingChen found out the truth, he went across three provinces and Xue Yang was still happily picking fights with others. Taking advantage of the Discussion Conference that was happening at the Jinling Tower of the LanlingJin Sect's residence, when the most prominent sects met up and discussed cultivation methods, Xiao XingChen brought him over, explained the situation, and demanded severe punishment.

With his straightforward list of evidence, most sects didn't have any objections, except for one—the LanlingJin Sect.

Wei WuXian, "Objecting in such a situation would be placing itself against the entire world. Could it be that Xue Yang was a favorite with Jin GuangShan?"

Lan WangJi, “A guest disciple.”

Wei WuXian, “He was a foreign disciple? Back then, the LanlingJin Sect was already one of the four most prominent sects, right? Why would they have invited a delinquent to be a guest disciple?”

Lan WangJi, “This is the second connection.”

He stared into Wei WuXian’s eyes, “Because of the Stygian % .”

Wei WuXian’s heart immediately skipped a beat.

The phrase was definitely not a stranger to him. On the contrary, nobody was more familiar to those three words than him.

Among all of the spiritual weapons he had forged when he was still alive, this was the scariest and most famous one.

When Wei WuXian first created it, he didn’t think too much about it. Single-handedly controlling corpses and spirits, of course he’d occasionally grow tired. Remembering a rare piece of iron ore he happened to have seen in a beast’s stomach, he used it to cast a Tiger Seal.

But, after the Tiger Seal had been created, Wei WuXian only used it once before finding out that it did more harm than good.

The Stygian Tiger Seal’s powers were considerably greater than what he had imagined. He originally wanted to use it to assist him, but its powers were almost exceeding him, its creator. Moreover, it didn’t settle on one single master. This meant that if someone got hold of it, no matter who they were, whether they were good or bad, friend or foe, they were able to use it.

After the seal had been forged, it wasn’t that Wei WuXian never thought about destroying it, but since the seal was created with much difficulty, it would’ve been extremely hard to destroy, costing him both time and energy. And, back then, he had already vaguely understood that he wasn’t in a good situation and would be hated by everyone sooner or later. With a weapon as appalling as the Stygian Tiger Seal, others didn’t dare to act rashly, so he temporarily kept it. He separated the seal into two halves, making it so that they could only be of use when they were put together, and never used without careful consideration.

He had only used it two times before, and both times caused great bloodshed. The first time was during the Sunshot Campaign. After using it for the second time, he finally decided to destroy

one half of the seal. Before he could completely destroy the other half, the siege at Luanzang Hill happened, and it had since then been beyond his capabilities.

Toward his own creation, Wei WuXian was confident to say that even if the sect that got hold of it, made a temple for it, and offered it incense every single day, the remaining half of the Tiger Seal was just a piece of scrap iron. However, Lan WangJi told him something shocking—it appeared that Xue Yang could rebuild the other half of the seal!

Although Xue Yang was young, he was also quite clever, a bizarre eccentric. The LanlingJin Sect discovered that he could use the remaining half of the seal to roughly piece together the other half. Even though the recreated version wasn't as powerful and couldn't be used for as long, it could already result in terrible catastrophes.

Wei WuXian understood, "The LanlingJin needed to keep Xue Yang so that he could continue to restore the Stygian Tiger Seal, so they had to protect him."

Perhaps, Xue Yang destroying the Chang Clan wasn't entirely to avenge what they did to him when he was young. He might have been testing on this clan of live humans what exactly was the extent of the restored Stygian Tiger Seal's powers!

No wonder the rumors connected the case to him. Wei WuXian could almost imagine those cultivators clenching their teeth, "That Wei WuXian! If he didn't make this, our world wouldn't have encountered so many disasters!!!"

Returning to the original thread of conversation, they continued about what happened at the Jinling Tower.

Although the LanlingJin Sect was determined on protecting Xue Yang, Xiao XingChen didn't waver either. As the stalemate continued, they finally startled ChiFeng-Zun, Nie MingJue, who didn't intend on participating in the Discussion Conference. He hurried over to Jinling Tower from far away.

In spite of Nie MingJue being a junior to Jin GuangShan, he conducted himself in a strict manner and refused to tolerate Xue Yang no matter what. With an angry lecture, Jin GuangShan was left with no words and a great deal of embarrassment. Nie MingJue, as the irritable person he was, unsheathed his saber on the spot with the intention of killing Xue Yang. Even when his sworn younger brother LianFang-Zun, Jin GuangYao, attempted to ease the situation, he ordered him to leave. After a harsh scolding, Jin GuangYao hid behind Lan XiChen, not daring to say anything else. In the end, the LanlingJin Sect could only give in.

Ever since Xue Yang was brought to Jinling Tower by Xiao XingChen, he hadn't been scared at all. Even when Nie MingJue's saber was pressed against his neck, he still had a grin on his face. Before he was taken away, he spoke affectionately to Xiao XingChen, " # , you wouldn't forget me, would you? Let's wait and see."

At this point, Wei WuXian knew that the "wait and see" would make Xiao XingChen pay an agonizing price.

The LanlingJin Sect was indeed the sect with the thickest face. Although, on Jinling Tower, it promised in front of all of the sects that Xue Yang would be executed, when it left Nie MingJue's sight, it immediately shut Xue Yang into the dungeons and changed the original decision to a life sentence. Hearing about the matter, Nie MingJue was enraged and pressed on them again. The LanlingJin Sect rambled about, refusing to give him Xue Yang no matter how hard he tried. All of the other sects watched them from the sidelines, but, shortly afterward, Nie MingJue passed away from Qi deviation.

He cultivated at a faster speed than any other past leader of the Nie Sect, and also died sooner than any of them.

Now that the person who was most difficult to deal with was gone, the LanlingJin Sect became more and more reckless and started to think of worse ideas. Jin GuangShan started to try as hard as he could to get Xue Yang out of the dungeons so that he could continue to restore and examine the Stygian Tiger Seal.

However, this wasn't exactly something to be proud of. It was impossible for him to save the murderer of an entire clan from the dungeons without a valid reason.

So, they turned their attention to Chang Ping.

From coercion to harassment, in the end, the LanlingJin Sect finally pressured Chang Ping into correcting his words, invalidating all of his past speeches. He announced that the wiping out of the Chang Clan had nothing to do with Xue Yang.

Hearing the news, Xiao XingChen visited him to inquire upon the matter. Chang Ping responded helplessly, "What can I do aside from this? If I don't tolerate it, the rest of our clan's people wouldn't be safe for long. I'm really grateful, Daozhang, but… please don't help me anymore. Now, helping me would be harming me. I don't want the YueyangChang Sect to end yet."

And thus, the tiger had been set free back to the mountains.

Wei WuXian stayed silent.

If he were Chang Ping, he wouldn't have cared how prominent or powerful the LanlingJin Sect was, or how much glory the road ahead offered him, and he wouldn't have let the matter go. Instead, he would've went to the dungeons on his own, cut Xue Yang up so that he was nothing more than a puddle of flesh on the ground, and summoned his soul back to repeat the process to the point that he regretted ever being born in this world.

But, not everyone was like him, preferring to perish together with his enemy. Some of the Chang Clan's people were still alive. Chang Ping was also still young, single, and childless, having just took his first few steps on the path of cultivation. No matter if he was threatened with the lives of his remaining family members or his own future and cultivation, he had to think carefully.

Of course, he wasn't Chang Ping himself. He couldn't be angered or worried in place of Chang Ping, and he couldn't bear Chang Ping's share of mental and physical torment.

After Xue Yang had been released, he started to take revenge again. However, this time, the revenge wasn't on Xiao XingChen himself.

Xiao XingChen left the mountain alone and had no family. He only had a friend that he met afterward, named Song Lan. Song Lan was also a cultivator of the time. He was a righteous, determined person and had a fair amount of appraisal. Both of them wanted to build a sect that valued common ideals instead of blood ties, which made them the closest and most like-minded of friends. The people of the time described them as such—Xiao XingChen the bright moon and gentle breeze; Song & the distant snow and cold frost.

Xue Yang put his hands to this side. Repeating his past technique, he wiped out the Baixue Temple where Song Lan grew up and studied at, and used poison to blind Song Lan's eyes.

This time, with his experience of wiping out a sect, he made sure to not leave any evidence. Although everybody knew that he was the one who did it, what would be the use of that? There wasn't any evidence. And, with Jin GuangShan's deliberate protection and the death of the violent ChiFeng-Zun, nobody could do anything about him.

Wei WuXian found this a bit strange. Although Lan WangJi looked as if he didn't care about anything, from Wei WuXian's past experiences with him, he absolutely couldn't stand wrongdoings, possibly even more than Nie HuaiSang's brother. Back then, the LanlingJin Sect had some dishonest ways of doing things, and Lan WangJi never bothered to be subtle about them. Even until now, he always refused to go to their sect's Discussion Conferences. If two cruel massacres happened, the news would've probably spread over the entire cultivational world

and Lan WangJi definitely wouldn't have turned a blind eye to them. Why did he not go and give Xue Yang what he deserved?

Just as he was about to ask, he remembered the scars that the discipline whip gave him.

One lash of the discipline whip would already be quite severe. If Lan WangJi made some sort of a grave mistake and received so many lashes, he had probably been grounded for a few years. It was likely that he was either going through his punishment or waiting for his wounds to heal during the years when the incidents happened. No wonder he said had only "heard" about what happened.

For some reason, in his heart, Wei WuXian cared quite a lot about those scars. However, it was inconvenient for him to ask directly, so he had to hold his thoughts for now, "Then, what happened to the Daozhang Xiao XingChen afterwards?"

What happened afterward was certainly a tragic ending. When he left the mountain and his teacher, Xiao XingChen vowed that he would never go back again. He was a man of his words, but since Song Lan was not only blind but also badly injured, he broke his vow and carried Song Lan back to BaoShan SanRen's residence, asking her to save his friend.

For the sake that they were once teacher and pupil, BaoShan SanRen agreed. Thus, Xiao XingChen left the mountain once more, and he was never seen again.

A year later, Song Lan also left the mountain. To everyone's surprise, his eyes, which were completely blinded, saw light again. However, it wasn't that BaoShan SanRen's medical skills created a miracle, but that Xiao XingChen… dug his own eyes out and gave them to Song Lan, who was only involved in this because of him.

Song Lan originally wanted to seek revenge on Xue Yang. At this time, Jin GuangShan had already passed away. Jin GuangYao took over the LanlingJin Sect and the position of Sect Leader. To show that things were going to be different, the first thing he did after he came to power was to get rid of Xue Yang. Aside from never mentioning the Stygian Tiger Seal again, he also made amends to restore the sect's reputation, suppressing the rumors. Song Lan went to search for his past friend's whereabouts. At first, people still heard talk about where he traveled to. After some time, he also disappeared. Moreover, the YueyangChang Sect was a small clan that was generally unheard of. And thus, a lot of things gradually faded away.

Having finished listening to the long story, Wei WuXian sighed softly. A feeling of regret sprouted inside him,

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Immediately afterward, he laughed at himself bitterly, "
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They had already walked past the Chang Residence, toward a cemetery nearby. Wei WuXian saw the dark-red character of “Chang” on the and asked, “Then, why did Chang Ping die afterward? Who killed the remaining members of his clan?”

Before Lan WangJi could answer, a series of came from amid the blue-tinted dusk.

The noise sounded a lot like slamming on doors, but it wasn’t. The bangs were carried out with force and at a fast pace, without a moment of rest. They sounded somewhat muffled, as if there was something separating them from the outside world.

Their faces immediately changed.

The fifty-or-so people of the YueyangChang Sect were currently lying in their coffins, slamming on their coffin lids from the inside. It was at night they were frightened to death—they madly slammed on the doors, but there wasn’t anyone to let them out.

This was the slamming on coffins in the Chang Clan’s cemetery that the liquor shop’s waiter talked about!

However, the waiter said that the haunting was ten years ago and stopped long before now. Why would the slamming happen to start again when they came?

Without passing any words between them, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi both softened their breathing, stealthily moving without making a sound.

Propping themselves against the pillars of the pailou, they both saw that, in the center of the cemetery, there was a hole amid the tombstones.

It was a deep, recently-created hole with piles of dirt surrounding it. Faint noises came from within the hole.

Someone was digging out a grave.

The two of them held their breaths, attentively waiting for the person in the hole to come out on their own.

Before an hour passed, two people hopped up from inside the opened grave.

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi could tell that these were two people only because they had good vision. These two appeared as if they were conjoined twins. One carrying the other on their back, they were tightly connected together. With both of them wearing entirely black clothes, it was extremely hard to tell the two apart.

The person that hopped up had long legs and long arms, standing with his back toward them. The one that he carried seemed lifeless, their head and limbs hanging down. This was only natural. Since the person was dug out from a grave, then it must have been dead. Lifeless was what should've been expected of it.

As he thought, the gravedigger suddenly spun around and saw them.

There was a mass of thick, black mist over the man's face, making it so that nobody could see how their face and features looked!

Wei WuXian knew that he must have casted some sort of strange spell to block his face. Lan WangJi had already unsheathed Bichen, darted into the cemetery, and started the fight. The gravedigger's reaction was extremely quick. Seeing the attack of Bichen's blue sword glare, he made a and also summoned a sword glare. The sword glare was the same as his face, surrounded by dense mist, and made it so that it was impossible to see what its color and style was. With a corpse on his back, the gravedigger fought in a strange way. The two sword glares clashed a few times. Lan WangJi summoned Bichen back and held it in his hand, a layer of frost climbing over his face.

Wei WuXian knew why his face suddenly turned cold. It was because, during the fight, even an outsider like him could tell that the gravedigger was extremely familiar with Lan WangJi's sword moves!

Lan WangJi said nothing. Bichen's attacks were deeper and deeper, attacking with tremendous force. The gravedigger fell back a few times. As if he knew that, with a dead person on his back, he wouldn't be able to win against Lan WangJi and, if they continued to fight, he'd be captured alive, he suddenly fished out a dark-blue talisman from his waist.

A Transportation Talisman!

This type of talisman could instantly transport someone to hundreds of miles away, but it also expended a great amount of spiritual energy. It would take a long time for the user to regain their energy. Those with spiritual energy that wasn't powerful enough wouldn't be able to use them. Thus, although they were of very high quality, it was rare for anybody to use them. Seeing that he was about to escape, Wei WuXian hurriedly clapped twice, got down on one knee, and slammed his fist on the ground.

The strength of his punch passed through layers of dirt, reached the depths of the soil, and penetrated the thick coffin lids, provoking the corpses trapped inside. With crackling noises, four bloodied arms shot up from the ground, grabbing both of the gravedigger's legs!

The gravedigger seemed as if he didn't care at all. He poured his spiritual energy toward the bottom of his legs, blasting the four corpse hands away. Wei WuXian pulled out his bamboo flute. A shrill, piercing melody ripped open the curtain of darkness that had fallen. Two human heads emerged from the ground along with their bodies, climbing upward from the gravedigger's legs and winding around his body as if they were snakes. Opening their mouths, they prepared to bite down at his neck and arms.

The gravedigger snorted with disdain, as if he was saying "what a petty trick", and sent spiritual energy throughout his body. Yet, this time, only after he released his energy did he realize that he had been fooled.

He sent the corpse that he carried on his back flying off as well!

Wei WuXian laughed uncontrollably as he smacked the tombstone, while Lan WangJi caught the flaccid corpse with one hand and attacked with Bichen using the other. Seeing that what he had just dug out had been snatched away, that he couldn't even win solo against Lan WangJi, let alone the mischief of another person, he didn't dare to stay any longer. He hurling the Transportation Talisman on the ground. After a loud noise, blue flames surged up toward his sky. His figure disappeared into the fire.

Wei WuXian knew that the gravedigger had a Transportation Talisman on him, which meant that, even if they caught him, he could find an opportunity to escape. The corpse that he dug out was already a clue, so he didn't have any regrets. He walked over to Lan WangJi, "Let's see who he dug out."

As he glanced at it, he was somewhat surprised. The head of the corpse had already been split open. From within the cut, there wasn't any blood or brains leaking out, but wads of blackened cotton.

Wei WuXian easily jerked the corpse's head off. With the delicately-crafted dummy head, he sope, "What is this supposed to mean? There's a fake corpse made of cotton and rags buried in the Chang Clan's cemetery?"

Having had weighed the corpse in his hands when he took it, Lan WangJi knew what was wrong, "Not all of it is fake."

Wei WuXian felt the corpse from head to toe and discovered that, aside from its drooping limbs, only its chest and abdomen felt firm and real. After he tore off the clothes, as he expected, he found that only the torso was real. All of the other body parts were fake.

The head and limbs made from cotton were to "deceive" the torso, so that it still thought it was attached to its owner's body. Seeing from the skin tone and the part where the left shoulder cut off, this must be the torso of the dear friend. The gravedigger was here for this.

Wei WuXian straightened up, "It looks like that the person who hid the corpse already noticed that we're investigating the issue and came to transfer the torso somewhere else in case we find it. To come early isn't as good as to come in time. We just happened to bump into him, haha. But," with a change of tone, he continued, "Why was the mist-faced gravedigger so familiar with your sect's sword style?"

It was obvious that Lan WangJi was also thinking about this matter, the coldness on his face yet to fade. Wei WuXian spoke again, "His cultivation is quite high, enough to support the energy used for one Transportation Talisman. He casted spells on both his face and sword. It's understandable that he casted a spell on his face—after all, he wouldn't have wanted to be seen. But most lesser-known cultivators wouldn't have needed to cast a spell on their sword to cover it, unless, of course, it was either somewhat or very famous in the cultivation world. He'd then have had to cover it, because if everyone could recognize his sword glare, his identity would be revealed as soon as his sword was revealed."

Wei WuXian asked suggestively, "HanGuang-Jun, from your fight before, do you think that he's someone you know really well?"

It'd be inconvenient for him to be more specific, such as Lan XiChen or Lan QiRen.

Lan WangJi answered assuredly, "No."

Wei WuXian was quite confident in Lan WangJi's answer. To him, Lan WangJi wasn't the kind of person who'd hide or run away from the truth. If he denied it, that meant it must have been wrong. He didn't like to lie, either. In Wei WuXian's opinion, if someone asked Lan WangJi to lie, he'd rather silence himself and not talk at all. Thus, Wei WuXian immediately excluded the possibility of the gravedigger being these two.

Lan WangJi put the torso into another double-layered Qiankun Pouch and put it away properly. The two walked around for a while and wandered back to the street of the liquor shop.

The young waiter was true to his words. Most of the other liquor shops on this street had closed already, but their banner was still up and their lights were still on. The waiter was outside, eating from a large bowl. Seeing them, he beamed, "You're back! We kept our word, didn't we? Did you two see anything?"

Wei WuXian laughed as he answered. With Lan WangJi, he walked back to the table they sat during the day.

With liquor jars crowding on the table and by his feet, he spoke, "Right, what were we talking about? Suddenly interrupted by the gravedigger, I still don't know how Chang Ping died."

Lan WangJi continued the explanation with simple, direct words.

Xue Yang, Xiao XingChen, and Song Lan left one by one. Some disappearing, some passing away. Quite a few years after the incident passed, one day, Chang Ping and the remainder of his clan's members died overnight due to lingchi. Moreover, Chang Ping's eyes were dug out.

This time, nobody could find out who the murderer was. After all, everyone apart of it had vanished. However, there was one thing that could be determined.

From the wounds, it could be verified that the sword that was used to lingchi them had been Xiao XingChen's sword, Shuanghua.

The bowl of liquor that Wei WuXian was holding stopped in front of his mouth. He was shocked by this turn of events, "He was lingchi-ed by Xiao XingChen's sword? Then was he the one who did it?"

Lan WangJi, "Xiao XingChen had disappeared. There were no conclusive evidence."

Wei WuXian, "If he couldn't be found alive, then has anyone tried soul-summoning?"

Lan WangJi, “Yes. Nothing was found.”

Nothing was found. He either didn’t die, or his soul had dissolved. As a someone who specialized in the area, Wei WuXian had to comment on the matter, “Things like soul-summoning, you can’t rely on them too much. Time, place, and person all play a part in it, so of course it’d sometimes go wrong. I’m guessing that a lot of people think that it was Xiao XingChen’s revenge? HanGuang-Jun, what about you? What do you think?

Lan WangJi slowly shook his head, “One should not comment without understanding the whole picture.”

Wei WuXian admired his attitude and principles a lot. Grinning as he drank another gulp of liquor, he heard Lan WangJi speak again, “What about you?”

Wei WuXian, “Lingchi is a type of torture. Its meaning involves “punishment”, anyways. Digging out the eyes also makes it quite hard not to associate it with Xiao XingChen, who also dug out his eyes. Thus, there’s nothing wrong with these people guessing that it was Xiao XingChen’s revenge. However,” he thought about how to phrase it, “I think that, in the beginning, Xiao XingChen never asked for Chang Ping’s gratitude when he first stepped in. I…”

Before he finished thinking of what should follow the “I”, the waiter eagerly brought over two dishes of peanuts. Having been interrupted, Wei WuXian didn’t need to continue anymore. He looked up at Lan WangJi and smiled, “HanGuang-Jun, why are you looking at me like this? I’m not saying anything. Just like you, I don’t understand the whole picture, so I’m not going to comment either. You’re right. Before knowing all of the turns and twists, causes and effects, nobody should presume anything about anything. I only ordered five jars, but you bought five more jars for me, so I’m afraid I won’t be able to finish all of them by myself. How about if you drink with me? This isn’t the Cloud Recesses, so it doesn’t violate anything, right?”

He had already prepared himself to be bluntly rejected, but who knew that Lan WangJi replied, “I will drink.”

Wei WuXian clicked his tongue, “HanGuang-Jun, you really have changed. Before, I drank a tiny jar in front of you, and you got so mad. You even threw me off the wall and hit me. Now, though, you’re hiding jars of Emperor’s Smile in your room and secretly drinking.”

Fixing his collars, he answered in a calm voice, “I did not touch any jar of Emperor’s Smile.”

Wei WuXian, “Why did you hide them if you’re not drinking anything? Saving them for me? Fine, fine. You didn’t touch them. I’ll believe you, okay? Let’s talk about something else. Come. I really need to see just how many cups would it take to make an abstinent disciple of the GusuLan Sect drunk.”

He poured a bowl for Lan WangJi. Without any thought, Lan WangJi took it over and drank up. Wei WuXian was unusually excited, staring at his face to see when it would turn red. Yet, even after he stared for a while, neither Lan WangJi’s face color or expression changed, staring at him calmly with light-colored eyes. There wasn’t any change at all!

Wei WuXian was extremely disappointed. As he was about to urge him for another jar, suddenly, Lan WangJi frowned and lightly rubbed at between his brows. After a few moments, with a hand supporting his forehead, he closed his eyes.

… He fell asleep?

… He fell asleep!

After most people drank so much liquor, they should become drunk first, and then sleep. How could Lan WangJi skip the step of getting drunk and go to sleep immediately?!

“Drunken” was the part that he wanted to see!

Wei WuXian waved at Lan WangJi, whose face remained serious even after he was asleep, then clapped beside his ears. There was no reaction.

Lan WangJi was surprisingly the type who collapses after just one bowl.

Wei WuXian didn’t expect this sort of situation to happen at all. Thinking as he shook his legs, he put Lan WangJi’s right arm around his arm, and dragged him out of the liquor shop.

He had already familiarized himself with the action of fishing things from Lan WangJi. After taking out the pouch containing money, he found an inn and asked for two rooms. He carried Lan WangJi to one of the rooms, took off his boots, tucked him in, and slipped into the night.

Stopping at a desolated area, Wei WuXian took out his flute by his waist, placed it by his lips, and played a melody. After this, he waited silently.

In these past few days, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi spent their days and nights together. He didn't have any alone time, so he couldn't summon Wen Ning. Aside from hiding his identity in the beginning, there was another reason.

Wen Ning had killed the GusuLan Sect's people before. Even if Lan WangJi treated Wei WuXian well, he couldn't summon Wen Ning right in front of him. Or, perhaps, it was because Lan WangJi treated him well that he didn't have the face to summon Wen Ning in front of him. No matter how thick his face was, this wasn't the time to have a thick face.

Before he knew it, the eerie jingling noises sounded again.

With his head lowered, Wen Ning's figure appeared from the shadows of the city wall ahead.

He wore all black, melting into the darkness surrounding him. Only his pupil-less eyes were a glaring, hideous white.

Wei WuXian put his hands behind him and slowly paced around Wen Ning.

Wen Ning shifted, as if wanting to follow his steps and walk in circles as well. Wei WuXian commanded, "Stand properly."

He complied and stopped moving. It seemed as if his delicate features appeared even more dejected.

Wei WuXian, "Hand."

Wen Ning extended his right arm. Wei WuXian grabbed his wrist and lifted it up, closely examining the iron cuff and chain locked onto it.

This wasn't an ordinary chain. When Wen Ning flipped out, he became extremely violent, capable of twisting iron into sludge, so he wouldn't have let it drag around like this. It was likely that this was a set of chains created especially to restrain Wen Ning.

Turned to ashes?

Trying as hard as they could to restore a damaged piece of Stygian Tiger Seal, of course some sects salivated at the Ghost General as well. How would they have been willing to turn him to ashes?

With a bitter laugh, he stood by Wen Ning's side. After considering for a moment, he started to press his fingers into Wen Ning's hair.

The person who kept and restrained Wen Ning must have prevented him from thinking on his own. To make him listen to other people's orders, Wen Ning's sanity must have been destroyed, which meant that they must've planted something inside his head. As he had expected, after pushing around a few times, Wei WuXian found a hard nib on an acupoint of the right side of his head. He put his other hand on the left side of Wen Ning's head and found the same thing, resembling the end of a needle.

Wei WuXian pinched both needle ends at the same time and gradually pulled two black, long nails from within Wen Ning's skull.

The two nails buried deep inside of Wen Ning were around an inch long and as thick as the red strings used for jade pendants. As soon as the nails left his head, Wen Ning's features quivered faintly. A layer of black lines that resembled strands of blood climbed across the whites of Wen Ning's eyes. It seemed as if he was trying hard to endure the pain.

How strange was it that, although he had died, he could still experience feelings of "pain".

Judging from the intricate, complex lines carved onto the nails, it must have came from a unique source. Their creator was fairly skilled. It'd take quite some time for Wen Ning to heal completely. Putting them away, Wei WuXian looked down at the chains on Wen Ning's wrists and ankles, thinking to himself that it'd be a bit inconvenient for them to hang around and make noise. He'd need to use a cultivational sword to cut them off.

The first that he thought of was, of course, Lan WangJi's Bichen. Although it somewhat unbefitting to use the sword of someone from the Lan Sect to cut off Wen Ning's chains, it was the best cultivational sword that he could get his hands on. He really couldn't let Wen Ning drag so many burdensome things behind him.

Wei WuXian thought to himself, ? % 6 "
 " % 6 " / "

Having made his decision, he turned around. However, what he didn't expect was that Lan WangJi was standing right behind him.

Translator's Notes

% : A tiger seal is a seal shaped like a tiger, traditionally used when commanding troops, with one half in the emperor's hands and the other in the general's. Only when both of them are put together can the general command the troops.

: This is an honorific used to address Daoist priests or simply cultivators in general. The character means "path", the same character from the word Daoist, while 7 means "leader". Interesting fact: Daozhang sounds best when the seme is younger than the uke, in which case, Xue Yang just so happens to be. This was one of the first reasons why a lot of people started to ship the two.

& : Song Lan is his birth name (which was what Xiao XingChen called him by—they were close), while Song ZiChen is his common name. Don't worry. I know that you're all thinking "it can't possibly get any more complicated", but it does. Luckily, there's a character and sect guide to prevent memory loss! As the evil person I am, I refuse to provide the link because I think you should exercise your brains in preparation for what happens later in the story. Angry/sad because it's inconvenient? You should exercise your hearts too, since I'm not sure if you can handle what's about to come.

3 : A pailou is simply Chinese-style archway. Since "links don't work", search it up on Google ;) Don't worry, I believe in you.

: Yes. Pretty much those things in Naruto (wait, you thought they were from Japan?). The hand seal, in this case, is used to command the gravedigger's sword.

Chapter 31 Dew—Part Four

After he summoned Wen Ning, Wei WuXian's state of mind was somewhat confused, so it was hard for him to be continuously alert. And, if Lan WangJi didn't want someone to notice his arrival, he could do it without any difficulty. Thus, as he turned around and saw the even colder face under the moonlight, his heart almost skipped a beat.

He didn't know how long Lan WangJi had been here for or if he had seen and heard what he was doing. If Lan WangJi had never been drunk in the beginning and followed him all the way here, the situation would be even more awkward, especially with him not saying anything to Lan WangJi's face and sneaking out to summon Wen Ning after Lan WangJi fell asleep.

Lan WangJi crossed his arms in front of him and held Bichen in them. His expression was particularly stiff. Wei WuXian had never seen him with such an obviously displeased expression on his face before. He felt that he needed to speak first and explain the situation, ease the atmosphere, “Ahem, HanGuang-Jun.”

Lan WangJi did not reply.

Standing in front of Wen Ning, Wei WuXian stared across at Lan WangJi. He touched his chin and, for some reason, felt exceptionally guilty.

Lan WangJi finally let down the hands that held Bichen and walked a few steps forward. Seeing that he went toward Wen Ning with a sword in his hand, Wei WuXian thought that he was going to kill Wen Ning, ? = % 6
5 ? 5 1 "

He blurted, “HanGuang-Jun, listen to me…”

With a loud smack, Lan WangJi hit Wen Ning.

Although it sounded quite strong, it didn’t actually do any damage. Wen Ning only staggered a few steps backward after the blow. He wobbled a bit and regained his balance, standing properly again with a blank face.

Wen Ning wasn’t in a state as easily angered as when he flipped out in the past, but his temper wasn’t too good either. During the night at Dafan Mountain, nobody could lay a sword on him before everyone was knocked down—he even held someone by his neck. If Wei WuXian didn’t stop him, he would’ve strangled every single one of the people at the scene. Yet, although Lan WangJi smacked him once, his head was still lowered, appearing as if he didn’t dare to resist. Wei WuXian thought that this was a bit strange, but he nevertheless felt relieved. If Wen Ning returned the strike and the two started fighting, it’d be even harder to intervene.

As if he didn’t think one smack was enough to express his rage, Lan WangJi pushed Wen Ning to about thirty feet away.

He spoke to Wen Ning in an annoyed voice, “Go away.”

Wei WuXian finally noticed that something was wrong.

Both the smack and the push, both his speech and actions were unusually… childish.

After he pushed Wen Ning so that he was far away enough, Lan WangJi seemed as if he was finally satisfied. He turned around walked over to Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian looked at him scrutinizingly.

There wasn't anything wrong with Lan WangJi's face and expression.. He was even more serious, proper, flawless than usual. His face wasn't flushed, his breathing wasn't short. He walked around steadily with confidence. It looked like that he was still the calm, righteous cultivator, HanGuang-Jun.

But, as he looked down, he found that Lan WangJi's boots were put on the wrong feet.

Before he left, he took Lan WangJi's boots off and tossed them beside the bed. And, now, Lan WangJi's left boot was on his right foot, while his right boot was on his left foot.

HanGuang-Ju, the prominent cultivator who valued manners greatly, would never have went outside with his clothes like this.

Wei WuXian asked tentatively, "HanGuang-Jun, what number is this?"

He made the number two with his fingers. Lan WangJi didn't answer and reached his hands out. With one on the left and one on the right, he solemnly wrapped his hands around both of Wei WuXian's fingers.

With a , Bichen fell to the ground due to its master's negligence.

Wei WuXian, "..."

This definitely wasn't the normal Lan Zhan!

Wei WuXian, "HanGuang-Jun, are you drunk?"

Lan WangJi, "No."

Drunk people usually didn't admit that they were drunk. Wei WuXian took his fingers back. Lan WangJi attentively maintained his gesture of how he grasped Wei WuXian's fingers, with both of his hands in loose fists. Wei WuXian was utterly speechless. Standing amid the chilly night breeze, he removed his gaze from Lan WangJi, and looked up at the moon.

Most people became drunk before they slept, while Lan WangJi slept before he became drunk. And, when he was drunk, he looked no different from how he usually was, which was why it was hard to tell.

In the past, Wei WuXian had countless friends to drink with. He had seen hundreds and thousands of ways people acted when they were drunk. Some wailed loudly, others giggled idiotically, some flounced about, others collapsed immediately, some were determined in taking their own lives, others whimpered, “Why are you leaving me?” However, this was his first time seeing someone like Lan WangJi, who didn’t make any noise, looked decent, yet acted strangely.

The corners of his lips twitched. Trying not to laugh, he picked up Bichen from the ground and carried into onto his back, “Okay. Let’s go back.”

He definitely couldn’t let Lan WangJi roam around outside like this. Who knew what else he could do.

Luckily, it seemed that Lan WangJi was also quite easy-going when he was drunk. With an elegant nod, they went off. If someone passed by, they would’ve thought that these were two good friends strolling in the night and praised the refined act.

Behind them, Wen Ning silently followed. Just as Wei WuXian was about to speak to him, Lan WangJi whirled around and angrily smacked him once more. This time, it was on Wen Ning’s head.

Wen Ning’s head was even more lowered due to the smack. Even though his facial muscles were rigid and couldn’t make any sort of expressions, even though his eye whites couldn’t make any sort of gazes, for some reason, he still looked as if he had been wronged. Not knowing whether to frown or laugh, Wei WuXian grabbed Lan WangJi’s arm, “What are you hitting him for?”

Lan WangJi spoke to Wen Ning in a threatening tone that he definitely wouldn’t have used if he was awake, “Go away!”

Wei WuXian knew that he shouldn’t disobey someone who was drunk. He hurried, “Okay, okay. It’s up to you. I’ll make him go away if that’s what you want.” As he spoke, he took out his bamboo flute. But, before he even placed the flute to his lips, Lan WangJi quickly grabbed it, “Do not play for him.”

Wei WuXian teased, “Why are you so pushy?”

Lan WangJi repeated angrily, “Do not play for him!”

Wei WuXian discovered that, although people who were drunk often had a lot of things to say, as Lan WangJi usually didn't like to speak, he would repeatedly say the same words after he drank. Seeing that Lan WangJi had never been too fond of demonic techniques, he might have not liked how he used his flute to control Wen Ning. Anyway, he had to pet him in the direction of his fur, of course, "Alright. I'm only going to play for you, okay?"

Lan WangJi announced his satisfaction with a , but continued to play with the flute in his hands, unwilling to return it.

Wei WuXian could only whistle. He spoke to Wen Ning, "Keep on hiding. Make sure nobody finds you."

Wen Ning seemed as if he really wanted to follow, but having received his commands and being scared that Lan WangJi would hit him a few more times, he slowly turned around. Dragging the chains behind him, he walked away dejectedly.

Wei WuXian turned to Lan WangJi, "Lan Zhan, now that you're drunk, why doesn't your face flush at all?"

Since Lan WangJi looked too normal, almost even more normal than Wei WuXian, he couldn't help but to talk to him as if he was talking to an ordinary person. Yet, unexpectedly, after Lan WangJi heard this, he reached out, grabbed his shoulder, and pulled him into his arms.

Caught off guard, Wei WuXian's head was slammed right into his chest.

As he recovered from the dizziness, Lan WangJi's voice came from above, "The heartbeats."

"What?"

Lan WangJi, "The face doesn't show anything. Listen to the heartbeats."

As he spoke, his chest vibrated from the low voice. A heart pulsated steadily and continuously. 3 , . It was a bit fast. Wei WuXian understood and looked up again, "I won't be able to tell from your face, only if I listen to your heartbeat?"

Lan WangJi answered sincerely, "Mnn."

Wei WuXian bent over in laughter.

Was Lan WangJi's face so thick that the blush couldn't even be seen? He wasn't this sort of person, was he?

And, Lan WangJi was so honest after he was drunk. His actions and comments were also… bolder!

Since this was a rare occasion to see such an honest, open Lan WangJi, it would've been impossible for Wei WuXian to treat him with respect and not play any tricks.

He hurried Lan WangJi back to the inn. Entering the room, he held him down on the bed and took off the boots that were put on wrong. Guessing that he probably didn't know how to wash his own face in such a state, he took off Lan WangJi's forehead ribbon, and brought in a basin of hot water along with a towel. Wringing the towel out, he folded it into a square and gently rubbed Lan WangJi's face.

During the process, Lan WangJi didn't resist at all, obediently allowing his face to be kneaded in all kinds of directions. Aside from squinting when the towel went near his eyes, he stared at Wei WuXian without even blinking. Wei WuXian had a ton of amusing ideas inside his head. Seeing his clear gaze, he couldn't help brushing a finger against Lan WangJi's chin. He laughed, "Why are you looking at me? Am I good-looking?"

He just happened to have finished cleansing. Before Lan WangJi could answer, Wei WuXian tossed the towel into the basin, "Your face is clean now. Do you want to have some water first?"

Having heard no answer from behind him, he turned around only to see Lan WangJi holding the basin in his hands, his face already buried inside.

Wei WuXian almost paled from the shock. He grabbed the basin and moved it away at once, "I didn't mean the water in here!"

Lan WangJi raised his head calmly. Transparent droplets of water rolled down his jaw, seeping into the front of his collars. Looking at him, Wei WuXian wasn't sure how to describe what he was feeling right now, = " , % 6
" ? "

Wei WuXian used his sleeves to wipe off the drops of water on Lan WangJi's jaw and put his arms around him, "HanGuang-Jun. Now, are you going to do whatever I tell you to do?"

Lan WangJi, "Mnn."

Wei WuXian, “You’ll answer whatever I ask you?”

Wei WuXian put one knee on the bed and smirked, “Okay. Let me ask you. Have you… secretly tasted the Emperor’s Smile you hid in your room?”

Lan WangJi, “No.”

Wei WuXian, “Do you like rabbits?”

Lan WangJi, “Yes.”

Wei WuXian, “Have you ever violated any rules before?”

Lan WangJi, “Yes.”

Wei WuXian, “Have you ever liked anyone?”

Lan WangJi, “Yes.”

All of Wei WuXian’s questions were just for the sake of them, not that he really wanted to find out about Lan WangJi’s private matters. He simply wanted to know whether or not Lan WangJi would really answer whatever he asked. He continued, “How about Jiang Cheng?”

A frown, “Hmph.”

Wei WuXian, “How about Wen Ning?”

Indifference, “Huh.”

Wei WuXian grinned and pointed at himself, “How about this one?”

Lan WangJi, “Mine.”

“...”

Lan WangJi stared at him, slowly and articulately stating, “Mine.”

Wei WuXian suddenly understood.

He took Bichen off his back, thinking to himself, % 6
( ) /

He got off the bed and walked around the room with Bichen in his hand, from the left to the right, from the East to the West. As he had expected, Lan WangJi's gaze closely followed wherever he walked, ever so sincere and straightforward, ever so blunt and bare.

Wei WuXian's legs almost gave out under Lan WangJi's heated gaze. He lifted Bichen in front of his eyes, "Do you want it?"

Lan WangJi, "I want it."

As if he thought that this wasn't enough to prove his desire, Lan WangJi grasped the hand that Wei WuXian held Bichen with and stared into his eyes with those light-colored pupils. Taking in a soft breath, he repeated his words, emphasizing every syllable, "... I want it."

Wei WuXian knew that Lan WangJi was desperately drunk, that it wasn't directed at him, yet those three words still crashed into him, taking away the strength in his arms and legs.

He thought to himself, % 6 " + "
" $

Recovering from the blow, Wei WuXian asked again, "How did you recognize me? Why did you help me?"

Lan WangJi opened his mouth. Wei WuXian shifted a bit closer, wanting to hear his answer. However, Lan WangJi's expression suddenly changed. With a shove, he pushed Wei WuXian onto the bed.

The candlelight was snuffed out with a wave of his hand. Bichen was thrown onto the ground by its master again.

Wei WuXian's sight spun dizzily from the shove. He thought that Lan WangJi woke up, "Lan Zhan?!"

A familiar place behind his back was tapped once. His entire body felt sore and numb and he couldn't move at all, similar to the first night at the Cloud Recesses. Lan WangJi took his hand away, lay down beside him, and put the blanket over them, carefully tucking in the blanket corner on Wei WuXian's side, "It is nine. Rest."

So, after all, it was the scary bedtime routine of the Lan Sect.

With the interrogation having been cut off, Wei WuXian stared at the ceiling, “Can’t we rest and chat at the same time?”

Lan WangJi, “No.”

… Oh well. Someday, there’d be a chance to get Lan WangJi drunk again. The answer would be revealed sooner or later.

Wei WuXian, “Lan Zhan. Remove it. I got us two rooms. We don’t need to be crammed in the same bed.”

After pausing for a moment, Lan WangJi’s hand came over and, after fumbling around in the blanket for a while, started to slowly untie the ribbons holding his clothes together. Wei WuXian exclaimed, “Okay! Enough! I didn’t mean for you to remove it in this sense!!! Alright!!! Sure! I’m lying down and I’m sleeping!!!”

A dead silence filled the darkness.

After keeping quiet for a while, Wei WuXian spoke again, “I finally understand why your sect prohibits liquor. You collapse after just one bowl and can’t tell good liquor from bad liquor. If everyone from the Lan Sect is like this when they’re drunk, you deserve to be prohibited from drinking. Anyone who drinks should be beaten up.”

With closed eyes, Lan WangJi raised his hand and covered Wei WuXian’s mouth.

He shushed, “Shh.”

The breath that Wei WuXian was about to take got stuck between his chest and his mouth, unable to come up or go down.

It seemed that, ever since he came back, whenever he decided to tease Lan WangJi like how he did in the past, he always suffered from his own actions.

This shouldn’t have been the case! Where exactly did he go wrong?!

Translator’s Notes

Here’s a hilarious comment that I found, favored by the author herself:

Speaking of it, the name of Wei Ying's (Wei WuXian's) friend who weeps and asks "why are you leaving me?" when drunk is Luo BingHe, isn't he?
(Confused, much? Check out the author's first work, 3 2 ; 2 '2 2)

Chapter 32 Dew—Part Five

This time, throughout the night, Wei WuXian didn't shut his eyelids even once. With opened eyes, he managed to hold out until the second morning. After feeling the numbness pass and that his limbs were able to move again, he calmly took off his shirt inside the blanket and threw it under the bed.

Then, he pulled off Lan WangJi's sash belt and succeeded in yanking his shirt half-off. He originally wanted to completely take off his shirt, but after seeing the sear under Lan WangJi's collarbone, Wei WuXian paused for a moment and stopped. Also remembering the Discipline Whip's scars on his back, he knew that he shouldn't go further and wanted to pull Lan WangJi's clothes back again. Due to the delay, Lan WangJi seemed as if he felt cold. Shifting slightly, he opened his eyes with a frown on his face.

As soon as his eyes were opened, he tumbled off the bed.

It really wasn't the elegant HanGuang-Jun's fault that he was not elegant at all after the shock. Any man who woke up with a hangover the morning after, saw another man lying beside him wearing nothing and that his own shirt was only half-on, and found that both of them were skin-to-skin snuggling in the same bedsheets, wouldn't have paid attention to be elegant.

Wei WuXian partially covered his chest with the blanket, leaving only his smooth shoulders out. Lan WangJi, "You…"

Wei WuXian purred, "Hmm?"

Lan WangJi, "Last night, I…"

Wei WuXian winked his left eye at Lan WangJi and smiled mysteriously, resting his chin on one hand, "You were so bold last night, Han GuangJun."

"..."

Wei WuXian, "Do you really remember nothing of the things that happened last night?"

It seemed that Lan WangJi really didn't remember. His face was already as pale as snow.

It was fortunate that he didn't remember. Or else, if Lan WangJi still remembered that he sneaked outside to summon Wen Ning during the night and asked about it, neither lying nor speaking truth would make the situation better.

With so many cases failing to tease Lan WangJi and lifting a rock only to have it drop on his on foot, Wei WuXian finally found some of his past abilities. Although he wanted to continue his successful pursuit, Wei WuXian still wanted to lure Lan WangJi into drinking again in the future, so he probably shouldn't go as far as to scar him for life, else Lan WangJi would be cautious the next time. Wei WuXian lifted the covers open and showed him the trousers and boots that he still had on, "What a man! HanGuang-Jun, it was only a joke. I just took off our clothes. You're chastity is still there. You hadn't been tainted. Don't worry."

Lan WangJi was still frozen on the spot and didn't answer. A shattering sound came from the center of the room.

The sound was quite familiar—it was already their second time hearing it. The Qiankun Pouches that had been on the table were becoming restless again, throwing the cups and teapots onto the ground. This time, with the three body parts together, it was even more wild. Last night, one of them was hopelessly drunk while the other was helplessly tormented, so of course they forgot all about the duet. Wei WuXian was worried that Lan WangJi was overly-shocked and would accidentally impale him onto the bed out of impulse. He hurried, "Serious business. Come, come. Let's do serious business first."

He wrapped a piece of clothing around him, hopped off the bed, and extended a hand toward Lan WangJi, who had just stood back up. He wanted to help him up, but it looked almost as if he wanted to rip his clothes. Lan WangJi still hadn't come over the shock and stepped backward, only to stagger from something under his foot. Looking down, it was Bichen, which had been lying on the ground ever since last night.

And, at this point, one of the ropes that tied the pouches had come loose. Half of an ashen arm had already crawled out of the tiny opening. Wei WuXian put his hand into Lan WangJi's semi-opened clothes and searched around, fishing a flute out of the other's arms, "HanGuang-Jun, don't be scared, alright? I'm not going to do anything to you. It's just that you took away my flute last night. I need to have it back." After the comment, he even considerately pulled Lan WangJi's collars back up and tied his sash belt properly.

Lan WangJi looked at him with a complicated expression, as if he really wanted to ask about the details of what happened after he was drunk. However, he was used to finishing important tasks first, so, suppressing his questions, he put on a serious expression and took out the seven-stringed guqin. Of the three Qiankun Pouches, one held the left arm, another held the legs, and the last

held the torso. The three parts could already form a large portion of the body. They influenced the others and the resentful energy multiplied, making them harder to deal with than before. The agitation only ceased after the two played : three consecutive times.

Wei WuXian put away his flute. He was about to gather up the body parts that rolled all over the ground when he suddenly commented, “Our dear friend hadn’t been missing his workouts.”

The sash belt of burial robe on the torso had already loosened. The collars opened to reveal the strong, solid body of a man in the prime of his life. With broad shoulders and a thin waist in addition to the sharply contoured abdominal muscles, it was the masculine body figure that countless men dreamed to have. Staring at it from every direction, Wei WuXian couldn’t help smacking those abs a few times, “HanGuang-Jun, look at him. If he were alive and I hit him, the impact would’ve bounced back and hurt myself. Just how on Earth did he train?”

The tips of Lan WangJi’s brows seemed to twitch, but he said nothing. Yet, unexpectedly, Wei WuXian smacked on it two more times. Lan WangJi finally took over the Qiankun Pouches, his face remaining expressionless, and silently started to seal the corpses. Wei WuXian made way for him at once. Quickly afterward, Lan WangJi finished sealing back all of the body parts and even tied quite a few dead knots over each one. Wei WuXian didn’t think too much of it. He looked down at the figure of his current body, raised his brows, and tied his sash belt again, appearing to be properly dressed again.

Looking to the side, he saw that Lan WangJi still glanced at him after he put away the Qiankun Pouches, his eyes full of hesitance. Wei WuXian purposely spoke, “HanGuang-Jun, why are you looking at me like this? Are you still worried? Trust me. I really didn’t do anything to you last night. Of course, you didn’t do anything to me either.”

Lan WangJi thought for a few moments. As if he finally made a decision, he lowered his voice, “Last night, other than taking your flute, I…”

Wei WuXian, “You? What else did you do? Nothing much, really. You just said a lot of things.”

The Adam’s apple on Lan WangJi’s snow-colored neck bobbed slightly, “... What sort of things?”

Wei WuXian, “Nothing too important. Pretty much, mnn, for example, you really like…”

Lan WangJi’s gaze froze.

Wei WuXian, “You really like rabbits.”

"..."

Lan WangJi closed his eyes and turned his head to the side. Wei WuXian added in consideration, "It's okay! Rabbits are so cute—who doesn't like rabbits? I also like them, as in, I like to eat them hahahahahaha! Here, HanGuang-Jun. You drank so much last night… Uh, not really. You were so drunk last night, so you're probably not feeling that good right now. You can wash your face, have some water, then rest for a while before we set off again. This time, it's pointing at the Southwest. I'll go buy some breakfast downstairs and not bother you any longer."

As he was about to go, Lan WangJi spoke coldly, "Wait."

Wei WuXian turned around, "What?"

Lan WangJi stared at him fixedly. Finally, he asked, "Do you have money?"

Wei WuXian grinned, "Yes! You didn't think that I don't know where you keep your money, did you? I'll grab some breakfast for you too, alright? HanGuang-Jun, you can take it slow. We're not in a hurry."

He left the room and closed the door behind him. In the hallway, he bent over and silently laughed for quite a long while.

Lan WangJi seemed as if he had received a major shock. He shut himself inside the room and didn't come out for a long period of time. As he waited, Wei WuXian sauntered downstairs, left the inn, and strolled around the area, buying some snacks along the way. He sat down on a set of stairs and bathed in the sunlight as he ate. After having sat there for a while, a group of thirteen-, fourteen-year-old children ran across the street.

The child in the front ran as if he flew, holding a long string in his hand. At the end of the string, a kite danced up and down in the air. The children behind him had toy bow and arrows, shouting as they chased and shot at the kite.

Wei WuXian also loved to play this game when he was young. Archery was a required skill for all disciples from prominent sects. However, most of them didn't enjoy shooting properly at a target. Aside from shooting evil beings during night-hunts, shooting kites was what they loved the most. Everyone had one; whoever flew the highest, furthest, and shot the most accurate was the winner. This game was originally only popular among the younger disciples of cultivational sects. After it became known to the public, the children of ordinary families also loved it, though,

of course, the damage from one of their little arrows was nothing compared to those of the skilled disciples'.

Back when Wei WuXian lived in the Lotus Pier and played shooting kites with the Jiang Sect's disciples, he won a lot of first places. Jiang Cheng, on the other hand, had always been second. His kites were either flown too far away to shoot down or near enough to shoot but not as far as Wei WuXian's. Their kite was almost twice the other people's kites, made into the shape of a flying beast. It had bright, exaggerated colors, a large, gaping mouth, and a few sharp tails that flapped in the wind. From a distance, it was exceptionally vibrant and lively, not quite terrifying, but almost a bit silly. The framework had been assembled by Jiang FengMian himself, then given to Jiang YanLi to paint. This was why, whenever they took the kite out to compete, they both felt a sense of pride.

Thinking of this, Wei WuXian's lips shaped into a smile. He couldn't help but raised his head to see how the kite that the children were flying looked. It was entirely golden, a round mass of some sort. He pondered to himself, # ?
"

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew over. The kite wasn't that high in the first place and it wasn't in an open space, so it was immediately knocked off. One child cried out, "Oh no, the sun fell!"

Wei WuXian understood at once. These children were probably playing a game in imitation of the Sunshot Campaign.

They were in the area of Yueyang. When the QishanWen Sect was at the peak of its prosperity, it abused its powers everywhere. And, since Yueyang wasn't far from Qishan, the people here must have suffered greatly, having been either troubled by their unleashed beasts or bullied by their arrogant cultivators. After the Sunshot Campaign ended, the Wen Sect was annihilated by the combined forces of other sects, the hundred-years-old foundation instantly crumbling down. Around the area of Qishan, a lot of places enjoyed activities that celebrated the Wen Sect's destruction, which almost turned into traditions. This game was probably one of them.

The children stopped the chase and, gathering together in contemplation, started to discuss, "What do we do? We didn't even shoot the sun, and it fell off by itself. Now who's the leader?"

Someone raised a hand, "Me, of course! I'm Jin GuangYao. I killed the Wen Sect's big villain!"

Sitting on the stairs leading to the inn, Wei WuXian watched them with keen interest.

In these types of games, the head of all cultivators, LianFang-Zun, who was currently the most successful of all, was of course the most popular character. Although his family background was a bit disgraceful, the fact that he later climbed to such a rank was precisely why people respected him. During the Sunshot Campaign, he skillfully worked undercover for the QishanWen Sect, deceiving all of the Wen Sect's people to a point that a tremendous amount of information were disclosed, yet they knew nothing. After the Sunshot Campaign, with flattery, wit, and countless other methods, he finally became the Chief Cultivator, fully deserving of the title. Such a life could even be considered a legend. If he was playing, he'd also want to try being Jin GuangYao. Choosing this boy to be the leader would very reasonable choice!

Someone else protested, "But I'm Nie MingJue! I've won the most battles and captured the most people. I should be the leader!"

"Jin GuangYao", "But I'm the Chief Cultivator!"

"Nie MingJue" raised swung his fist, "So what if you're the Chief Cultivator. You're still my youngest brother. You'll have to run away whenever you see me anyways."

"Jin GuangYao" did indeed cooperate and maintain his character. Flinching his shoulders, he quickly ran away. Someone else spoke up, "You short-lived idiot."

Choosing a cultivator to be must have meant that they felt admiration toward the certain cultivator. "Nie MingJue" raged, "Jin ZiXuan, you died even earlier than I did, so you're more short-lived!"

"Jin ZiXuan" responded defensively, "What's wrong with being short-lived? I'm ranked third."

"Even if you're third, it's only your face!"

One of the children seemed to be tired from all the running and standing. He also moved to the stairs and sat down beside Wei WuXian. Waving his hands, he mediated between the two, "Okay, okay. Let's stop fighting. I'm the YiLing Patriarch, so I'm the most powerful. So, if you guys insist so much, I can be the leader."

Wei WuXian, "..."

He looked down. There really was a small, wooden stick stuck beside the boy's waist, probably Chenqing.

Only simple-minded children like this would deign to be the YiLing Patriarch, only discussing in terms of power, not whether he was good or evil.

Someone else barged in, “No. I’m the . I’m the most powerful.”

The “YiLing Patriarch” replied as if he understood everything, “Jiang Cheng, how is it possible for you to be better than me? Is there even one time that you didn’t lose against me? How do you dare to say that you’re the most powerful? Aren’t you embarrassed?”

“Jiang Cheng”, “Hmph, I can’t be better than you? Do you remember how you died?”

The light smile on Wei WuXian’s face dissipated at once.

It was as if he had suddenly been pricked by a poisonous needle. A faint, sharp pain came from all around his body.

The “YiLing Patriarch” who sat beside him clapped his hands, “Look at me! Chenqing on my left, the Tiger Seal on my right, along with the Ghost General—I’m invincible! Hahahaha…” Holding a stick on his left hand and a rock on his right, he laughed for quite awhile, “Where’s Wen Ning? Come out!” A child from behind the crowd raised a hand and replied feebly, “I’m here… Uh… I’m just saying… When the Sunshot Campaign happened, I wasn’t dead yet…”

Wei WuXian felt that he really needed to interrupt.

He asked, “Cultivators, may I ask a question?”

When the children played this game, there had never been an adult who stepped in. Not to mention, it wasn’t a scolding, but this sort of serious question. The “YiLing Patriarch” looked at him with both wonder and caution, “What do you want to ask?”

Wei WuXian, “Why isn’t there anyone from the GusuLan Sect?”

“There is.”

“Where are they?”

The “YiLing Patriarch” pointed at a child who never said anything from the beginning to the end, “That’s him.”

Wei WuXian looked over. The child had delicate features, the seedling of a charming, handsome man. A white rope wrapped around his smooth forehead, in place of a forehead ribbon. Wei WuXian asked, “Who is he?”

The “YiLing Patriarch” pouted in disdain, “Lan WangJi.”

… Fine. These children understood the essence. Someone acting as Lan WangJi should indeed shut his mouth and stay silent!

Out of the blue, Wei WuXian’s lips curled upward again.

The poisonous needle had been pulled out, tossed into some random corner. All of the pain had been instantly wiped away. Wei WuXian murmured to himself, “How strange. Why can someone as boring as him always make me so happy?”

When Lan WangJi came downstairs, he saw Wei WuXian sitting on the stairs. A group of children sat around him, eating steamed meat buns together. Wei WuXian ate his meat bun as he directed two children who stood back-to-back in front of him, “... Now, in front of you, there are thousands of the Wen Sect’s cultivators. All of them were heavily armed and surrounded you so closely that even a single drop of water wouldn’t have leaked in. Your eyes should be sharper. Yes, that’s it. Okay, Lan WangJi, pay attention here. You aren’t how you usually would be. You’re covered in blood! There’s a lot of killing intent! You look really scary! Wei WuXian, move closer to him. Do you know how to spin the flute? Let me see you spin it, with only one hand. Be cooler. Do you know how to look cool? Come, let me show you.” “Wei WuXian” responded and gave the small stick to him. Wei WuXian adeptly whirled “Chenqing” between his fingers, causing all of the children to crowd around him and gasp in awe.

Lan WangJi, “...”

He silently walked over. Seeing that he was here, Wei WuXian dusted off his trousers and said goodbye to the children. Finally managing to stand up, he laughed as he walked, almost as if he had taken some strange poison.

Lan WangJi, “...”

Wei WuXian, “Hahahahahaha I’m sorry, HanGuang-Jun. I gave them all of the breakfast I bought for you. Let’s buy some more later.”

Lan WangJi, “Mnn.”

Wei WuXian, “What do you think? Were those two kids cute? Guess who was the one with a rope tied around his forehead pretending to be, hahahaha…”

After a while of speechlessness, Lan WangJi finally couldn’t hold it any longer, “... What else did I really do, last night?”

It definitely wasn’t that simple. Or else, what could’ve made Wei WuXian laugh even until now???

Wei WuXian quickly waved his hands, “No, no, no. You didn’t do anything. I’m just being ridiculous, hahahahahaha… Okay. Ahem. HanGuang-Jun, I’m going to talk serious business now.”

Lan WangJi, “Speak.”

Wei WuXian pulled on a straight face, “The coffin-slamming noises of the Chang Clan’s cemetery had been silent for ten years. Suddenly starting again, it definitely wasn’t a coincidence. There must’ve been some other cause.”

Lan WangJi, “What do you think the cause is?”

Wei WuXian, “Good question. I think that the cause was the corpse being dug out.”

Lan WangJi, “Mnn.”

His expression was so attentive that it made Wei WuXian recall how sincere he looked as he held both of his fingers last night, when he had been drunk. Painfully holding back laughter, Wei WuXian continued in all seriousness, “I think that the dismemberment of the corpse probably wasn’t simply to seek revenge and vent hatred, but a malicious way of suppression. The person who cut up the corpse intentionally chose those places haunted by evil beings to place the body parts.”

Lan WangJi, “Combatting poison with poison. They balance out and keep each other in check.”

Wei WuXian, “That’s right. So, since the gravedigger dug out the torso yesterday, there wasn’t anything to suppress the Chang Clan’s resentful spirits anymore, so that coffin-slamming noises started again. It’s the same as how the QingheNie Sect’s Saber Hall suppressed the saber spirits and wall-corpses. Perhaps, this technique was derived from the Nie Sect’s Saber Hall in the first place. It looks like that this person is connected to both the QingheNie Sect and the GusuLan Sect. I’m afraid they aren’t some easy opponent.”

Lan WangJi, “There are only few people like this.”

Wei WuXian, “Yep. The truth is slowly being unveiled. And, since the opponent started to move the corpse parts already, it means that he or they are already starting to become anxious. They’ll definitely move again soon. Even if we don’t go find them, they’ll come and find us. As they search around, they’d leave behind more clues for sure. And, our dear friend’s hand will also tell us which direction to go. But we’ll probably need to move faster as well. Only the right hand and the head are left. After this, we must also arrive before they do.”

The two travelled in the direction of the Southwest. This time, the ghost hand pointed at Shudong, a place known for heavy fog.

It was a haunted city that nobody in the area dared to approach.

Translator’s Notes

: This is Jiang Cheng’s title. Check out the Character and Sect Guide for more details.

Chapter 33 Grasses—Part One

The Shudong area was abundant in rivers and valleys. With towering peaks and a rough terrain, only faint breezes passed the area, causing the majority of places to be enveloped in mist.

Walking straight toward where the left hand pointed, the two of them came upon quite a small village.

A few rails of fencing encircled thatched houses made from mud. A brood of colorful chicks scuttered in and out of the yards, pecking on the ground for rice. A large, bright-feathered rooster stood single-legged on a roof. With a twitching comb, it looked downward loftily, its neck turning left and right. It was fortunate that nobody had any dogs. It was likely that these villagers could only get their hands on a few chunks of meat a year, much less have any leftover bones to feed the dogs.

In front of the village, there was a fork road, leading to three different directions. Of these, two were rather bare. Covered with a great deal of footprints, it was clear that they were often walked upon. Yet, the last one have been overrun with weeds. A square sign made from a piece of rock was positioned slantingly at this road. Subject to age and weathering, the sign was split down the middle with a large crack. Even from within the crack, withered weeds peeked out.

Two large characters, which appeared to be the place that the road led to, had been carved onto the sign. One could manage to tell that the bottom character was the character for “city”. However, the top character was complex in both form and brushstrokes. The crack just so happened to have run through it, causing a few broken bits of rock to lay scattered on the ground. Wei WuXian bent down and pushed the weeds aside. Even after staring at it for a long time, he still couldn’t figure out what the character was.

Coincidentally, the direction that the left arm pointed at was indeed this path.

Wei WuXian, “Why don’t we ask the villagers?”

Lan WangJi nodded. Of course, Wei WuXian didn’t expect to ask. With a large grin over his face, Wei WuXian walked toward the villager women who were feeding the chicken.

Among the group women, some were old and some were young. Noticing the approach of an unfamiliar man, all of them looked nervous, as if they wanted to throw their dustpans away and flee back inside. Only after Wei WuXian exchanged a few words with them, a cheerful smile on his face, did they finally begin to calm down and respond shyly.

As Wei WuXian pointed at the sign and asked a question, their expressions changed at once. They paused for a moment, and unwillingly started to converse with him. During the chat, they didn't dare to look at Lan WangJi, who stood by the sign, at all. With the corners of his lips still curved upward, Wei WuXian listened intently. Eventually, it seemed as if the topic had switched, and the women's expressions calmed again. They gradually relaxed and started to smile timidly at him.

Lan WangJi stared at them from afar. He waited for a while, but Wei WuXian still didn't seem like he intended to return. Slowly looking to the ground, Lan WangJi kicked a small chunk of rock that was by his feet.

He stepped on it for a long time, rolling the innocent rock over again and again. As he looked up again, he saw Wei WuXian take something from his sleeves and hand it to the woman who spoke the most.

Lan WangJi stood still, a blank look on his face. When he really couldn't control himself anymore, ready to approach them, Wei WuXian finally sauntered over.

He stood back beside Lan WangJi, "HanGuang-Jun, you should've went. There were even rabbits in the yard!"

Lan WangJi didn't react to his teasing comment and responded with feigned indifference, "What have they answered?"

Wei WuXian, "This path leads to Yi City. The first character on the sign is 'yi'."

Lan WangJi, "Yi as in chivalry?"

Wei WuXian, "Yes and no."

Lan WangJi, "And why is

that?"

Wei WuXian, "The character is correct, but not the meaning. It's not yi as in chivalry, but yi as in a ."

They stepped over the bundles of weeds and went on the path, quickly passing the sign. Wei WuXian continued, "The girls said that, ever since a long time ago, most of the people in that city have died early, either having short lives or meeting accidental deaths, so there were a lot of

coffin homes for temporarily holding the corpses. Also, their specialty is in making coffins,

, and other sorts of burial goods. Everyone was skilled at no matter it be making coffins or paper mannequins, which is why it became known by such a name."

Aside from wilted weeds and pieces of rocks, on the path, there were also cracks and ditches that were difficult to notice. Lan WangJi kept his eyes on wherever Wei WuXian stepped, while Wei WuXian talked as he walked, "They said that the people here rarely go to Yi City. The people inside don't leave, either, for reasons other than the export of goods. In the past few years, almost nobody could be seen leaving. Nobody has walked on this path for years. Sure explains why it's so hard to walk over."

Lan WangJi, "And?"

Wei WuXian, "And what?"

Lan WangJi, "What did you give them?"

Wei WuXian, "Oh. You mean that? It's rouge."

When they were in Qinghe, he bought a small compact of rouge from the charlatan that told him information about the Xinglu Ridge, and had always kept it with him. Wei WuXian, "You have to show people your thanks when you're asking them things, right? I wanted to give them money, but they were too scared and didn't dare to take it. It seemed like that they really liked the scent of the rouge. They had probably never used such a thing before, so I gave it to them."

With a pause, he added, "HanGuang-Jun, why are you looking at me like this? I know that the rouge's quality really isn't that great. But I'm not like how I used to be, when I always had a ton of flowers and jewelry on me to give the girls. I really don't have anything else to give them. At least it's better than nothing."

As if a displeasing memory had bubbled up, Lan WangJi's brows twitched, and he slowly turned his head away.

Walking along the rough path, the weeds gradually became fewer, climbing back toward the sides, and the road also widened. Yet, the fog grew denser.

As the left hand formed a fist, a city gate lay in ruins at the end of the long path.

The tower in front of the city had missing paint and a broken roof. With one corner chipped off, it looked unusually dilapidated. The walls of the city were covered in graffiti done by some unknown person, while the red color of the doors had almost faded white, every single one of its

doornails rusty and black. The pair of doors was left unlatched, almost as if somebody had just opened a slit and slipped inside.

Even before entering, one could feel that this must be haunted with ghosts and demons running wild.

As Wei WuXian walked down the path, he examined the surroundings carefully. At the city gates, he commented, “The feng shui is horrible.”

Lan WangJi nodded without hurry, “Barren mountains and turbulent rivers.”

Yi City was surrounded by steep cliffs on all sides. The cliffs tilted toward the center in an extreme manner, appearing both menacing and constricting, almost as if it would collapse any moment. Bound by these dark, massive peaks and enveloped in the ghostly white fog, it appeared even monstrous than monsters. Even simply standing here would make one feel anxious and suffocated, along with a strong sense of being threatened.

Ever since the ancient times, there had been the saying that “the greatness of a person brings glory to their birthplace”. The opposite saying was also present. In some places, because of the terrain or location, the feng shui would be exceptionally awful. Surrounded by a natural gust of sinister energy, it was easy for anyone who lived there to die early or be generally unlucky. If all of their ancestors dwelled there, then they’d be even more unfortunate. Also, irregularities such as living corpses or the return of souls. It was clear that Yi City was such a place.

Places like this were usually in secluded locations that weren’t under the control of any cultivational sect. Of course, even if they were, sects wouldn’t want to help either. Such situations really were annoying, even more annoying than the Waterborne Abyss. The Waterborne Abyss could be chased away. However, feng shui was difficult to change. If nobody wailed in front of their doors, the sects turned a blind eye and pretended that they didn’t know.

For the city’s residents, the easiest solution was to leave the place. But, if someone’s family had been living at a secluded place for generations, it’d be almost impossible for them to make the decision to leave where they grew up. Even if five or six out of ten people would have short lives, maybe they would be the remaining three or four. It didn’t seem too unbearable.

The two halted before the city gates and exchanged a look.

2 . Supported by hinges on the verge of snapping, the two city doors, although being unable to align properly, slowly opened.

Before their eyes, there was neither bustling streets nor violent corpses. There was only an all-enveloping shade of white.

The fog was even a few times denser than the fog outside the city, allowing them to only see a long, straight street ahead of them. On the sides, there stood no passers, but only brooding houses.

The two of them naturally walked a few steps nearer to each other, and entered the city together.

It was still daytime, but no sound could be heard in the city. Aside from the lack of human voices, not a single note of caws or barks could be heard either. It was more than peculiar.

Then again, since this was the place where the left arm pointed, it'd be stranger if it weren't peculiar.

They walked down the street for a while. The farther they went, the thicker the fog, as if evil energy permeated the air. At first, they could still manage to see anything within ten steps' distance. And then it became impossible to make out any figure more than five steps away. In the end, they couldn't even see their hands in front of them. The more Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi walked, the closer to each other they shifted. They could only manage to see each other's face if they walked shoulder-to-shoulder. A thought suddenly popped into Wei WuXian's mind,

" "

" " .

Suddenly, his foot stepped on something. He looked down, but couldn't tell what it was. Wei WuXian grasped Lan WangJi's hand firmly so that he didn't go off on his own, bent down, and squinted. A head with a pair of glaring eyes ripped through the fog, jumping into his sight.

The head had the face of a man with thick brows, large eyes, and two smudges of rouge that stood out acutely.

When Wei WuXian stepped on the head, he almost sent it flying, so he knew how heavy it weighed. Being so light, this definitely wasn't a human head. He picked it up and squeezed it. A large part of the man's face sunk in. Some of the rouge was also smudged.

It was a head made from paper.

The paper head was skillfully crafted. Although the makeup was overly dramatic, the features were rather delicate. Yi City's specialty was burial goods, so of course the technique of crafting paper mannequins was decent. Among the paper mannequins, there were substitute mannequins,

which the people believed that, if burned for the deceased, would suffer in hell in place of them; there were also maidservants and beautiful girls, which would attentively care for the deceased in the nether world. Of course, these were really only made for the living to feel some relief. This paper head was probably a “Nether Brawler”.

Like its name, a “Nether Brawler” was a fighter, said to be able to protect the deceased from the bullying of other ghosts or tricky " ; the paper money that the juniors burned wouldn’t be stolen away by other souls either. The paper head definitely had a large, sturdy body also made of paper to go with it. Someone had probably pulled the head off and thrown it onto the streets.

The strands of hair on the paper head were jet-black and quite glossy. Wei WuXian touched it. The hair was firmly attached to the scalp, as if the head really grew the hair. He thought to himself, " =

Suddenly, a thin shadow swept past him.

The shadow was extremely bizarre. It ran past, brushing against his shoulder, and instantly disappeared into the thick fog. Bichen unsheathed on its own, chasing after the figure, but quickly returned to its sheath.

The thing that slipped by him ran too quickly—a human definitely couldn’t have reached that speed!

Lan WangJi, “Pay attention. Be careful.”

Although it only brushed past, it was difficult to say that the next time it came, it wouldn’t do something else.

Wei WuXian straightened up, “Did you hear that?”

Lan WangJi, “Footsteps and a bamboo pole.”

He was correct. During the moment, aside from hurried footsteps, they heard another strange noise. The ' sounded rather clear, as if someone was quickly tapping a bamboo pole on the ground. Wei WuXian didn’t know why the noise was present.

In front of them, from within the fog, came another series of footsteps.

This time, the footsteps were light, slower, and greater in number. It seemed as if a group of people were carefully approaching, but not saying anything. Wei WuXian fished out a Gloom-

burning Talisman and tossed it forward. If anything surrounded by resentful energy was in front of them, it would burn up, and the fire would probably somewhat light up the area.

The people in front also noticed that something had been tossed at them. They immediately attacked.

A multitude of differently-colored sword glares rushed over. Bichen unsheathed calmly and drifted in front of Wei WuXian, fending off all of the glares. On the other side, the people fumbled in confusion. Hearing the shouts, Lan WangJi immediately sheathed Bichen. Wei WuXian called out, “Jin Ling? SiZhui!”

As he expected, he hadn’t heard wrong. Jin Ling’s voice sounded through the white fog, “Why’s it you again?!”

Wei WuXian, “Well, actually, I want to know why it’s you again!”

Lan SiZhui tried to contain himself, but his voice sounded delighted, “Young Master Mo, you are also here? Then is HanGuang-Jun here as well?”

Hearing that Lan WangJi might also be here, Jin Ling shut his mouth immediately, as if he had been silenced again. He was probably scared that he’d be punished again. Lan JingYi also shouted, “He definitely is! The glare before was from Bichen, right? It was Bichen, right?!”

Wei WuXian, “Yep. He’s here, right beside me. You should come over.”

As soon as the boys knew that the ones in front of them were friend instead of foe, they immediately let out a few sighs of relief and scurried over. Aside from Jin Ling and some of the Lan Sect’s juniors, there were also seven or eight boys wearing clothes of different sects, who still acted hesitant. They were probably also disciples from distinguished backgrounds. Wei WuXian asked, “Why are all of you here? With such an attack, it’s lucky that I have HanGuang-Jun by my side. What if you hurt ordinary people?”

Jin Ling retorted, “There isn’t any ordinary people here—there isn’t any people here at all!”

Lan SiZhui nodded, “It is daylight, but there is fog everywhere. And there is not a single shop open.”

Wei WuXian, “This won’t matter for now. How did you guys run into each other? Don’t tell me that you arranged to night-hunt together.” Jin Ling saw everyone as an eyesore and wanted to fight with everyone. And, since he already had an unpleasant interaction with the Lan Sect’s

disciples, how would it be possible that they wanted to night-hunt together? Lan SiZhui obediently explained, “That would be a long story. We were originally…”

Suddenly, a series of clucks and taps, the unusually ear-piercing noise of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground, came from within the dense fog.

The juniors’ faces changed at once, “It’s here again!”

Translator’s Notes

: A coffin home refers to a building where “a temporary coffin depository where the coffins containing the cadavers of recently deceased people are temporarily stored while awaiting transport to the place of burial.” (Wikipedia)

" : In Chinese folklore, when someone dies, they go to the underworld to be recorded by a judge. There are a lot of different versions, and this really isn’t that important.

Chapter 34 Grasses—Part Two

The sudden peculiar noises of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground sounded loud then soft, far then near, making it so that it was impossible to determine where or what exactly was making it.

Wei WuXian, “All of you, come over. Huddle close. Don’t move and don’t attack.”

Amid the fog, if the juniors all withdrew their swords and attempted to attack, it’d be possible for them to hurt themselves instead of the enemy. After a moment, the noise stopped. Having waited in silence for a few seconds, one disciple spoke under his breath, “It’s again… Just how long is it going to follow us for?!”

Wei WuXian, “It’s been following you?”

Lan SiZhui, “After we entered the city, because the fog was too thick and it would be easy to wander off, we decided to walk closely together. Then, we suddenly heard the noise. At the time, it was not as fast. It went quite slowly, one knock at a time. Through the fog, we also managed to see a short shadow walk past, right in front of us. But when we chased over, it disappeared. The noise has been following us ever since.”

Wei WuXian, “How short?”

Lan SiZhui gestured at his chest, “Very short. Very small.”

Wei WuXian, “How long have you been here for?”

Lan SiZhui, “Around fifteen minutes.”

“Fifteen minutes?” Wei WuXian asked, “HanGuang-Jun, how long have we been here for?”

Lan WangJi’s voice sounded from behind the hazy fog, “Around thirty minutes.”

“Look, “Wei WuXian continued, “We’ve been here for longer than you did. How is it possible that you ended up in front of us, and only ran into us after you turned around?”

Jin Ling couldn’t help but replied, “We never turned around. We’ve always been walking forward, following this path.”

If both of them were walking forward, then would it be possible that someone jinxed the path and made it into a cyclic maze array?

Wei WuXian asked again, “Have you tried using your swords to fly up and see?”

Lan SiZhui, “Yes. I thought that I flew a long distance upward, but it was actually not that high. And there were also some fuzzy shadows darting here and there. I did not know what they were and was afraid that I could not deal with them, so I came down.”

Hearing this, everyone was silent for a while. Since the Shudong area was foggy anyway, they never thought too much about the fog in the city. Now, it seemed that the fog didn’t form naturally and really was a ghostly mist.

Lan JingYi was shocked, “The fog wouldn’t be poisonous, would it?!”

Wei WuXian, “It probably isn’t. We’ve been in here for quite a while, and we’re still alive.”

Jin Ling, “I should’ve brought Fairy with me. It’s all because of your damned donkey.”

Hearing the dog’s name, goosebumps climbed all over Wei WuXian’s back. He then heard

Lan
JingYi shout, “We have not even blamed your dog yet! It opened its mouth to bite first, and then it ended up with Lil’ Apple’s hoove. Whose fault was that? Anyhow, neither of them can move at this point.”

Wei WuXian, “What?! My Lil’ Apple was bitten by a dog?!”

Jin Ling, “How can that donkey be more important than my spiritual dog? Fairy was given to me by my youngest uncle. If something happened to it, not even ten thousand donkeys could pay for it!”

Wei WuXian retorted in all absurdity, “Don’t use LianFang-Zun’s name to scare people off. Well, my Lil’ Apple is a gift from HanGuang-Jun. How could you take Lil’ Apple out to night-hunt? And even let it be injured?!”

The juniors from the Lan Sect responded in unison, “Liar!” They would never believe that someone like HanGuang-Jun would choose such a gift for someone. Even if Lan WangJi didn’t speak up, they firmly refused to believe it. Lan SiZhui clarified, “Uhh… Sorry, Young Master Mo. Your Lil’ Apple… Your donkey had been making noise everyday in the Cloud Recesses, and the seniors had been complaining for a long time, ordering us to get rid of it during this

night-hunt. So, we…”

Jin Ling didn't believe that the donkey was a gift from Lan WangJi either, "I can't even stand looking at that donkey. And it's even called 'Lil' Apple'. It's so damn stupid!"

Lan JingYi thought that, if it really were from HanGuang-Jun, then they'd be in trouble. He immediately spoke up for it, "What is wrong with 'Lil' Apple'? It likes to eat Apples, so it is called Lil' Apple. How down-to-earth. This is ten times better than calling your fat dog 'Fairy'!"

Jin Ling, "How is Fairy fat?! Try finding me a spiritual dog that's in a better shape than…"

Suddenly, all of the chatter ceased.

A few seconds later, Wei WuXian asked, "Is anyone still there?"

A series of oomph-s and mmn-s came from around him, which meant that everyone was there. Lan WangJi coldly stated, "Noise."

… How could he silence everyone at once? Wei WuXian couldn't help but touched his lips, feeling quite lucky.

All of a sudden, the sound of footsteps came amid the fog on the front-left side.

The footsteps staggered in an tremendously cumbersome way. Immediately afterward, from the front, the front-right, the sides, and the back came the same sound. Although the fog was too thick for any figures to be seen, the rancid stench had already drifted over.

Of course, Wei WuXian wouldn't worry about just a few walking corpses. He whistled lightly, and ended on a note that curved upward, signalling for them to back off. As he had expected, after the corpses behind the fog heard the whistle, they briefly paused.

However, a moment later, they rushed over!

Wei WuXian didn't expect this at all. Not only did the command not work, it actually provoked them. He would never have mixed up the two different commands of "back off" and "be stimulated"!

Yet, at the moment, there wasn't any time for him to think. Seven or eight slanting figures had already appeared through the white fog. Judging from the thickness of the fog in Yi City, the fact that they could see them meant that the corpses were already extremely near!

Bichen's icy-blue sword glare tore open the fog. Surrounding the group, it drew a distinct circle in the air, cutting all of the walking corpses in half then returning back to its sheath. Wei WuXian let out a breath of relief, while Lan WangJi lowered his voice, "Why?"

Wei WuXian was also wondering why,

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" " " #

Suddenly, he remembered something. A thin layer of sweat seeped from his back.

No. It wasn't that "a situation like this has never happened before". In reality, it had indeed happened before, and not only once. There really was a type of corpse or spirit that he couldn't command—

Corpses or spirits that were already under the control of the Stygian Tiger Seal!

Lan WangJi lifted the silence spell, and Lan SiZhui could talk again, "HanGuang-Jun, is the situation really dangerous? Should we leave the city at once?"

"But the fog is so thick. We cannot use the path or fly out either…"

One disciple exclaimed, "I think more corpses are coming!"

"Where? I did not hear any footsteps."

"I think I heard strange breathing sounds…" The boy only realized what a ridiculous remark it was after he said it, shutting his mouth in embarrassment. Another boy responded, "You really are something, are you not? Breathing sounds. Corpses are dead—how can there be any breathing sounds?"

Before he finished, another large figure crashed over. With Bichen unsheathing again, the shadow's head separated from its body. At the same time, strange splashing sounds could be heard. The disciples who were near the scene all screamed in fright. Afraid that they were hurt, Wei WuXian immediately called out, "What happened?"

Lan JingYi, "Something spurted out of the corpse's body. I think it was some sort of powder. It tasted both bitter and sweet. And rotten!" It was very unlucky for him. Since he happened to have wanted to speak, he opened his mouth, and a fair amount of powder went inside. Not caring about how he looked, he immediately spat a few times. The things that gushed out from a corpse

were undoubtedly not trivial matters. The powder still roamed in the air. If it was accidentally sucked into the lungs, it would've been even harder to deal with than if it entered one's mouth. Wei WuXian instructed, "All of you, stand away from that area! Come here quickly. Let me see you."

Lan JingYi, "Okay. But I cannot see you. Where are you?"

One couldn't even see their hand if it was right in front of them, let alone walk in this fog. Wei WuXian recalled that, whenever Bichen was unsheathed, its sword glare could penetrate the white fog. He turned to Lan WangJi, who stood by his side, "HanGuang-Jun, draw your sword for a moment, so that he can walk over."

Lan WangJi was standing right beside him, yet neither replied nor moved.

Suddenly, a clear, blue sword glare lit up an area around seven steps away.

… Lan WangJi was there?

Then who was the person that had always stood silently beside him?!

Suddenly, a shadow flashed before Wei WuXian's eyes. A dark face approached from in front of him.

It was dark because, on top of the face, there was a thick layer of black mist!

The mist-faced man reached out for the Qiankun Pouch hung by his side. However, after he had taken it, the Qiankun Pouch suddenly swelled up. The string that had tied it snapped in half, and three enraged spirits shot forward. Forming an entangled mess, they charged toward him!

Wei WuXian laughed, "Did you want the Qiankun Pouch? Then, your eyesight must be in a bad shape. Why did you take my % 3 instead?"

Ever since they snatched the recently-unearthed torso from the gravedigger's hands in the YueyangChang Sect's cemetery and caused him to retreat frustratedly, Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi had always been on the alert. They predicted that he wouldn't give up and would instead look out for any opportunity to take it back. As they had expected, after they entered Yi City, the gravedigger attacked, intending to take advantage of the thick fog and the chattering crowd. Indeed, his attack worked, but Wei WuXian had long since swapped the Qiankun Pouch that held the left arm with the Spirit-Trapping Pouch.

With a , the opponent jumped backward and unsheathed his sword. Instantly, the spirits' hatred-filled screeches sounded about, as if the attack pushed them toward the verge of dissipating. Wei WuXian thought to himself, 2 "
. He immediately shouted, "HanGuang-Jun, the gravedigger's here!"

Without needing the reminder, Lan WangJi knew that something had happened just by listening. He stayed silent. Bichen's swift, fierce sweep served as response.

The current situation was far from optimistic. A black mist covered the gravedigger's sword, making it so that the sword glare didn't come through and allowing it to hide perfectly within the white fog. On the other hand, the sword glare from Lan WangJi's Bichen couldn't be concealed at all. He was out in the open while the enemy was hidden in the dark. Also, the enemy was not only highly skilled in terms of cultivation, but he was also familiar with the GusuLan Sect's sword moves. And, although both of them were fighting blindly in the fog, he could do whatever he wanted, yet Lan WangJi had to be careful so that he didn't accidentally injure anyone on his own side. Seeing from all of this, Lan WangJi was really at a disadvantage. Having heard a few clashes of the blades, Wei WuXian's heart suddenly tightened. He blurted out, "Lan Zhan? Are you hurt?!"

From afar, there came a muffled grunt, as if someone had received a critical injury. It clearly wasn't Lan WangJi's voice, though.

Lan WangJi, "Of course not."

Wei WuXian grinned, "So it seems!"

It sounded as if the other person laughed bitterly. He attacked again. The clashing sounds of Bichen's glare and the other sword were farther and farther away. Wei WuXian knew that Lan WangJi didn't want to accidentally hurt them and purposely drew the battle away to deal with the gravedigger on his own. Of course, the rest was up to Wei WuXian. He turned around, "How are the ones who inhaled the powder?"

Lan SiZhui, "They are starting to have trouble standing up!"

Wei WuXian, "Come to the middle and number yourselves

off."

It was fortunate that, after finishing off a wave of walking corpses and leading away a gravedigger, nothing else came to disturb them. The noise of the bamboo pole didn't come out to make trouble either. The remaining disciples gathered around and counted themselves off.

Nobody was missing. Wei WuXian took Lan JingYi into his hands and felt his forehead. It was a

bit warm. He then felt the foreheads of the other boys who had inhaled the powder from the corpse. They were the same. He lifted Lan JingYi's eyelids, "Show me your tongue. Ahh."

Lan JingYi, "Ahh."

Wei WuXian, "Yep. Congratulations. You're under corpse poisoning."

Jin Ling, "How is this something to congratulate someone for?!"

Wei WuXian, "It's another life experience. It'd be a conversation starter when you grow older."

Corpse poisoning was mostly due to being wounded by a turned corpse or having a wound touch their necrotic blood. Cultivators usually didn't allow walking corpses to get so near that they get wounded, so nobody made it a habit to carry elixirs that cured corpse poisoning. Lan SiZhui worried, "Young Master Mo, will anything happen to them?"

Wei WuXian, "Nothing at the moment. When it goes in the bloodstream and travels all around the body and enters the heart, then nothing could help anymore."

Lan SiZhui, "Wh-what will happen?"

Wei WuXian, "Whatever happens to corpses will happen to you. If you're lucky, you're just going to rot away. If you're not, you might become a long-haired zombie and you'll only be able to hop around for the rest of your life."

All of the poisoned disciples gasped.

Wei WuXian, "So you want to cure it?"

Everyone nodded. Wei WuXian continued, "If you want to cure it, then listen up. From now on, all of you have to behave and listen to whatever I say. Every one of you."

Although a lot of the boys still weren't familiar with him, seeing that he could intimately call HanGuang-Jun by his birth name as if they were from the same generation, that they stood in the middle of a ominously foggy haunted city, and that they were both poisoned and feverish, they felt particularly anxious, instinctively wanting to depend on someone. And, since anything that came out of Wei WuXian's mouth somehow had a tone of confidence that eliminated all worries, they couldn't help but listened to his words, answering in unison, "Yes!"

Wei WuXian pressed further, "You have to do whatever I tell you to. Be obedient. Understood?"

“Yes!”

Wei WuXian clapped, “Stand up. Those who aren’t poisoned can carry those who are, preferably over the shoulder. If you can only lift them on your front, remember to position the head and the heart higher than the rest of the body.”

Lan JingYi, “But I can walk. Why do we need to be carried?”

Wei WuXian, “Brother, if you jump around, your blood is going to circulate quickly, and it will enter your heart sooner. So you shouldn’t move too much. It’s best if you don’t move at all.”

The boys immediately stood as still as boards, allowing their peers to lift them up. Carried on the shoulder of another disciple from his sect, one boy mumbled, “The corpse that sprinkled the poisonous powder really did breathe.”

The boy who carried him complained as he panted on, “I already told you. If it knew how to breathe, then it’d be a living person.”

Lan SiZhui, “Young Master Mo, all of them have been carried. Where will we go?”

Lan SiZhui was the nicest, most obedient, and least worrisome one. Wei WuXian replied, “At the moment, we definitely won’t be able to leave the city. Let’s knock a few doors.”

Jin Ling, “Knock the doors of what?”

Wei WuXian thought for a moment, “Is there anything else that has doors except for houses?”

Jin Ling, “You want us to enter these houses? It’s already this dangerous outside. Who knows what things are hidden in these rooms, watching and waiting for us.”

After he spoke, everyone felt that there really were pairs of eyes hidden within the fog and the houses, closely watching their every move, their every word. They couldn’t help but shuddered in fear. Wei WuXian responded, “True. It’s hard to say whether outside the houses or inside the houses is more dangerous. But, since it’s already like this on the outside, the inside can’t be any worse. Let’s go. There’s no time to lose. We still need to cure the poisoning.”

The group had to do what they were told. Listening to Wei WuXian’s instructions, everyone held the sword sheath of the person in front of him, so that they didn’t wander off amid the dense fog. From house to house, they knocked on the doors. Jin Ling pounded for awhile, and didn’t hear

any response from within the house, “There doesn’t seem to be anyone inside this one. Let’s go in.”

Wei WuXian’s voice drifted over, “Who told you to enter if there wasn’t anyone inside? Continue knocking. We need to go into a house that does have someone inside of it.”

Jin Ling, “You want to find one with someone inside?”

Wei WuXian, “Yes. Knock nicely. Your knocks were too strong. It’s quite rude.”

Jin Ling was so irritated that he almost kicked the wooden door down. In the end, he only… stomped angrily on the ground.

Every household by the street shut its door tightly, refraining from opening it no matter how hard they knocked. The more Jin Ling knocked, the more annoyed he became, but the amount of force he exerted had clearly lessened. On the other hand, Lan SiZhui remained calm. At the thirteenth shop, he repeated the phrase that had already been repeated a number of times, “Excuse me. Is anyone inside?”

Suddenly, the door shifted. A thin, black slit had been opened.

It was very dark on the other side of the door, not allowing anyone to make out what was behind the slit. The person who opened the door didn’t speak either. The boys who were close by couldn’t help but stepped backward.

Lan SiZhui regained his composure, “Excuse us, but are you the manager of the shop?”

A moment passed, and an old, bizarre voice leaked from the slit, “Yes.”

Wei WuXian walked over and patted Lan SiZhui’ shoulder, signalling for him to step back as well, and spoke, “Manager, it’s our first time coming here. The fog was so thick that we got lost. We’ve been walking for a long time already, and we’re rather tired. Would it be possible for you to lend your shop so that we can rest a bit?”

The bizarre voice replied, “My shop is not for travellers to rest.”

Wei WuXian looked as if he didn’t find anything strange at all, and spoke with his usual expression, “But, in the area, there isn’t any other shop that has anyone inside. Manager, are you really not willing to do us a favour? We are willing to pay.”

Jin Ling blurted out, “How would you get the money to pay? Let’s make this clear— won’t lend you money.”

Wei WuXian waggled a delicate pouch in front of his eyes, “Look what this is.” Lan SiZhui was shocked, “How dare you?! This is HanGuang-Jun’s!”

As they argued, the slit was opened a bit further. Although they still couldn’t see the furniture in the room, they could see that a gray-haired, expressionless woman stood behind the door.

Although the old woman had a hunched back, appearing quite elderly at first glance, she actually didn’t have a lot of wrinkles or age spots. It would even be possible to describe her as middle-aged. She proceeded to open the door and move out of the way. It looked like that she was willing to let them in.

Jin Ling was astonished. He whispered, “She really is willing to let us in?”

Wei WuXian also whispered, “Of course. One of my feet was within the slit, so she couldn’t close the door even if she wanted to. If she still didn’t let me in, I would’ve just kicked the door down.”

Jin Ling, “...”

Yi City was already frightening and peculiar; the people who lived here were definitely not ordinary either. Seeing how suspicious the old woman looked, the disciples all whispered in silence. Although they didn’t want to go inside at all, there wasn’t any other choice left for them. They could only pick up their peers, who were too scared to move an inch due to the poisoning, and enter the door one by one. The old woman stood waiting on the side, looking coldly at them. When everyone was inside, she immediately closed the door. The room was pitch-black again. Wei WuXian asked, “Manager, why do you not open the lights?”

The old woman, “The light is on the table. Light it yourselves.”

Lan SiZhui just happened to be standing by a table. Slowly feeling around, he found an oil lamp covered with a thick layer of dust. He fished out a fire talisman and lit it up. As he moved it toward the lampwick, unintentionally looking around the room, a gush of cold air washed from his feet to his head. His scalp tingled with terror.

Within the shop’s central chamber, a roomful of people were crammed inside, shoulders to shoulders and heels to heels. Each and every single one of them had their eyes wide open, staring at them without a single blink!

Translator’s Notes

% 3 : This used to be called the Spirit-Locking Pouch.

Chapter 35 Grasses—Part Three

T/N: *You don't want to be eating while reading this.

He couldn't help but loosen his hand, yet Wei WuXian saved the oil lamp just as it was about to hit the ground. Calmly brushing it against the burning fire talisman on the other hand, he lit it up and set it onto the table, "Did you make these yourself, Manager? They're quite well-made."

The rest finally realized that the people who stood in the room were not real humans, but actually paper mannequins.

The mannequins' heads and bodies were delicately crafted, the same size as those of real people. There were men, women, and even children. All of the men were "Nether Brawlers", crafted with tall, sturdy bodies and angered expressions. All of the women were fair-featured beauties, with hair in either single or double buns. Even when covered with loose-fitting paper clothes, one could still see their graceful postures. The patterns on the clothes were almost finer than those of real brocade robes—some were colored with rich, vivid ink; others were uncolored, left with ashen grays. On each mannequin's cheeks, there were two smears of blush in pretense for a living person's rosy complexion. However, none of their pupils had been added yet—the eyes were entirely white. The bolder the blush was, the gloomier they looked.

There was another table in the room. On the table, there were a few candlesticks, each a different length than the others. Wei WuXian lit them up one by one, and the yellow light illuminated most corners of the house. Aside from the paper mannequins, there were also two wreaths placed on both sides of the room. Paper gold, ghost money, and pagodas were heaped up beside the walls.

Jin Ling already had his sword slightly unsheathed. Seeing that it was only a shop that sold burial goods, he sighed with discreet relief and sheathed his sword again. In the cultivational world, even if a cultivator passed away, nobody employed the eerie, chaotic obsequies of the common folk. Since they hadn't seen such things before, after the initial scare, curiosity sprouted from within their hearts. With skin covered in goosebumps, they felt that it was even more exciting than night-hunting ordinary beasts.

No matter how dense the fog was, it couldn't seep into houses. Ever since they entered Yi City, this was the only point in time were they could easily see one another's faces, which set their minds at rest. Wei WuXian saw that they'd relaxed, and asked the old woman again, "Would it be possible for us to borrow your kitchen?"

The old woman almost glowered at the lamp, as if she disliked the presence of any light, “The kitchen is in the back. Use it as you please.” After her words, she dodged into another room as though she was avoiding the plague. She slammed the door so loud that a few even shivered.

Jin Ling exclaimed, “There’s definitely something wrong with the hag! You…”

Wei WuXian responded, “Okay. Hush. I need somebody to help me. Any volunteers?”

Lan SiZhui hurried, “I can come.”

Lan JingYi was still standing as straight as a stick, “Then what do I do?”

Wei WuXian, “Remain standing. Don’t move if I don’t tell you to.”

Lan SiZhui followed Wei WuXian to the kitchen in the back. As soon as they went in, they were overwhelmed by a foul stench. Lan SiZhui had never smelled such a terrible scent before. Although his head spun, he managed to stop himself from rushing back out. Jin Ling followed as well, but leapt outside again immediately after he entered. He fanned the air as fast as he could, “What in the world is this?!! What are you doing here instead of thinking up cures?!”

Wei WuXian, “Hmm? Perfect timing. How did you know that I was going to call you over? Lend me a hand.”

Jin Ling, “I’m not here to help! Urgh! Did somebody kill someone but forget to bury them?!”

Wei WuXian, “Young Mistress Jin, are you coming or not? If you’re coming, then come in and help; if you’re not coming, then go back and tell someone else to come over.”

Jin Ling raged, “Who are you calling Young Mistress Jin? Be careful what you say!” He pinched his nose for a while, debating with himself whether or not to stay or to leave, and finally humphed, “Well I want to see what on Earth you’re trying to do.” With this, he stormed inside. Yet, he didn’t expect that, with a , Wei WuXian opened a chest on the ground, which was where the stench came from. Within the chest, there were ham and chicken. Blotches of green dotted among the red meat, while white, coiling maggots dotted among the green.

Jin Ling was forced to exit the room again. Wei WuXian picked up the chest and passed it to him, “Throw it away. Anywhere works, as long as we don’t smell it.”

With a churning stomach and a head full of doubt, Jin Ling threw it out as he was told. He fiercely rubbed his fingers with a handkerchief, then threw it out as well. After he returned to the

kitchen, Wei WuXian and Lan SiZhui fetched two buckets of water from the well in the backyard, and were currently cleaning the kitchen. Jin Ling demanded, “What are you doing?”

Lan SiZhui wiped around in diligence, “As you can see, we are cleaning the kitchen hearth.”

Jin Ling, “What’s the use of cleaning the hearth? We’re not making food or anything.”

Wei WuXian, “Who told you so? We making food. You can sweep the dust. Get rid of all the cobwebs up there.”

His words sounded so natural, so assured that, with a broom stuck into his hands, Jin Ling somehow obeyed. The more he cleaned, the more he felt that something was off. Just as he was about to throw the duster at Wei WuXian’s head, Wei WuXian opened another box, scaring him to the point that he darted out again. Luckily, this time, there wasn’t any stench.

The three worked quickly. After a short while, the kitchen looked completely different. The house finally seemed a bit more lively, no longer haunted and long-abandoned. In a corner, there were some already-chopped firewood. They piled them into the hearth and set them alight using a fire talisman. They rested a large pot that they had already washed on the hearth and began to boil water. Wei WuXian poured some glutinous rice out of the second chest, washed all of it, and put it into the pot.

Jin Ling, “You’re making congee?”

Wei WuXian, “Uh-huh.”

Jin Ling hurled the cleaning rag onto the ground. Wei WuXian commented, “You see how you get mad after working for just a bit? Look at SiZhui. He worked the hardest and didn’t even say anything yet. What’s wrong with congee?”

Jin Ling, “What’s not wrong with congee? It’s so watery and tasteless! Wait… I’m not mad because there’s something wrong with congee!”

Wei WuXian, “It’s not for you anyways.”

Jin Ling was even more angered, “What did you say? I worked for so long, and I don’t even get any?!”

Lan SiZhui, “Young Master Mo, is it that congee can cure corpse poisoning?”

Wei WuXian smiled, “Yes, but it’s not the congee that can cure corpse poisoning—it’s the rice. This is folk medicine. Normally, you apply the glutinous rice to the scratched or bitten wound. In the future, if you ever find yourselves in such a situation again, you can try this. Although it’ll hurt a lot, it definitely works efficiently. But, since they swallowed corpse poisoning powder instead of being scratched or bitten, we can only make some rice congee for them to eat up.”

Lan SiZhui came to realization, “So that was why you intended to enter a house with someone inside. Only a house with someone living inside could have a kitchen. Only a kitchen could have glutinous rice.”

Jin Ling, “Who knows how long the rice has been here for? Can you still eat it? This kitchen hasn’t been used in at least a year. There’s dust everywhere and the meat’s even rotten. Don’t tell me that the hag hasn’t eaten for an entire year. It’s impossible that she has practiced inedia. How did she survive?”

Wei WuXian, “It’s either that nobody has been living here and that she really isn’t the shopkeeper at all, or that she simply doesn’t need to eat.”

Lan SiZhui lowered his voice, “If she does not need to eat, then she would be dead. But the old woman clearly breathes.”

Using a spatula, Wei WuXian nonchalantly stirred the pot of congee, mixing in ingredients from various bottles and jars, “Right. You haven’t finished explaining. Why did you come to Yi City together? It wasn’t just by chance that you ran into each other and then us, was it?”

The boys’ expressions immediately grew serious. Jin Ling replied, “I, the Lan Sect’s people, and the ones from other sects were all chasing after something. I came from the Qinghe area.”

Lan SiZhui also replied, “We came from Langya.”

Wei WuXian, “What was it?”

Lan SiZhui shook his head, “We do not know. It never showed its face. We don't even know what or who… or which organization it was, exactly.”

Ever since a few days ago, after Jin Ling lied to his uncle and let Wei WuXian go, he had been worried that this time Jiang Cheng would really break his legs, so he decided to sneak out and disappear for a few days, not appearing in front of Jiang Cheng until his anger subsided. He ran away immediately after he passed Zidian to one of Jiang Cheng’s trusted subordinates. Having arrived at a city on the border of the Qinghe area, his journey paused. In search for the location

for his next night-hunt, he took a short rest at a large inn. At night, when he was memorizing spells in his room, Fairy, who lay by his side, suddenly started barking at the door. It was already deep into the night. Jin Ling ordered the dog to stop, yet he immediately heard someone knocking on the door.

Although Fairy stopped barking, it was still restless. Its claws dug at the ground as it growled deeply. Already on the alert, Jin Ling asked for who the person was. There came no reply, so he got back to his business. However, after an hour, the knocks sounded again.

Jin Ling leaped out the window along with Fairy. He circled around and went upstairs from the first floor, intending to see who exactly was messing with him in the middle of the night. Despite his efforts, there was nobody there. He waited silently for a while, but still didn't see anyone in front of his door.

Keeping an eye on this, he let Fairy guard the door. He was ready to attack the person at any moment and stayed awake for the whole night. Despite this, nothing had happened. There were only some strange sounds, as if water was dripping down.

On the second morning, a scream came from outside the door. Jin Ling kicked the door open only to step into a pool of blood. Something fell from above the door. Darting backward, Jin Ling barely managed to prevent it from hitting him.

It was a black cat!

Someone, not long ago, nailed the corpse of a dead cat on top of his door. The strange dripping sounds he heard throughout the night were from the cat's blood dripping down.

Jin Ling, "It was the same after switching to a few different inns, so I went on the offensive. If I heard that a cat's corpse happened to appear anywhere, I would go and see, since I just had to find out who was messing around."

Wei WuXian turned to Lan SiZhui, "You guys as well?"

Lan SiZhui nodded, "Yes. A few days ago, a few of us were night-hunting at Langya. During dinner one day, we suddenly fished out the unskinned head of a cat from inside the soup… In the beginning, we did not know that it was directed at us, but on that night, when we switched to another inn, we found the corpse of a cat in one of the bedsheets. It was the same for a few continuous days. We chased after it, arrived at Yueyang, and ran into Young Master Jin. We found out that we were searching for the same thing, so we decided to work together, and only

arrived at this area today. We asked a hunter in the village in front of a stone tablet, and we were shown the path to Yi City."

Wei WuXian thought to himself, #

The juniors should've passed the village in front the road fork after Lan WangJi and he did. However, they didn't see any hunters at the time. There were only a few timid village women feeding chicken, who said that the men were out shipping goods and wouldn't be back for a long while.

The more Wei WuXian thought about it, the more solemn his expression grew.

From the narration, their opposition did nothing other than killing cats and dumping the corpses. Although it both sounded and looked scary, they weren't actually harmed. In fact, these events stirred up their curiosity to get to the root of the matter.

Also, these juniors met one another in Yueyang. Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi also came to Shudong from Yueyang. It almost seemed as if somebody was purposely leading the muddleheaded juniors to meet up with the two of them.

To lead a few confused juniors to a dangerous place for them to face the violent limb of a fierce corpse—wasn't this the exact same routine as the occurrence at Mo Village?

And, this wasn't the most complicated part of it. Right now, what Wei WuXian feared the most was that… the Stygian Tiger Seal might be within Yi City at this very moment.

Although Wei WuXian didn't really want to accept this possibility, it was nonetheless the most reasonable explanation. After all, someone who could restore half of the Tiger Seal had even existed. Despite the talk that he had been dealt with, who knew where the seal that he had restored went?

Suddenly, Lan SiZhui, who had been squatting on the ground to fan the flame, raised his head, " Mo, I think that the congee is ready?"

Gathering his thoughts, he stopped stirring. He grabbed the bowl that Lan SiZhui had washed and tasted a spoonful of the congee, "It's ready. Take it out. Feed one bowl to each person who had been poisoned."

However, after it had been carried out, Lan JingYi only had one mouthful before spitting it out, "What is this? Poison?!"

Wei WuXian, “How is this poison? It’s the cure! Glutinous rice congee.”

Lan JingYi, “First of all, I don’t know know why glutinous rice would be the cure, but I’ve never eaten such a spicy bowl of congee before!”

The rest of the boys who had taste their servings nodded in unison, all of their eyes wet with tears. Wei WuXian stroked his chin. He grew up in Yunmeng. People from Yunmeng were all quite spice-tolerant, but Wei WuXian’s penchant for spice was beyond hardcore. Anytime he set about the kitchen, the food would be so spicy that even Jiang Cheng could only smash his bowl and curse. Yet, for some reason, he just couldn’t hold back from adding spoonful after spoonful of seasoning. It seemed that, this time, he wasn’t able to control his hands either. Out of curiosity, Lan SiZhui picked up the bowl and tried a mouthful. Even as his face flushed red and his eyes teared up, he pursed his lips and refrained from spitting it out, thinking to himself, 3 + 1

Wei WuXian, “All medicine is poisonous to some degree. The spice will make you sweat so that you get better sooner.”

The "" -s coming from the boys revealed their disbelief. Nonetheless, with bitter faces, they ate up the congee. Within seconds, all of their faces reddened and their foreheads gleamed as they suffered from the agony. Wei WuXian couldn’t help but comment, “It’s not that serious, is it? HanGuang-Jun is also from Gusu. He takes spice quite well, so why are you guys like this?”

Lan SiZhui answered with a hand covering his mouth, “No, Senior. HanGuang-Jun’s taste is very mild. He never eats spice…”

Wei WuXian paused for a moment, “Really.”

But he could remember that in his past life, before he betrayed the YunmengJiang Sect, he had met with Lan WangJi in Yiling once. At the time, although Wei WuXian was widely reviled, it wasn’t to the point that everyone wanted to beat him up. Thus, pulling on a thick face, he asked Lan WangJi to have dinner with him so that they could reminisce together. All of the dishes that Lan WangJi ordered were packed with Sichuan peppers, and so he had always thought that Lan WangJi’s taste for spice was pretty much the same as him.

Now that he thought about it, he couldn’t remember whether or not Lan WangJi actually picked up his chopsticks. Then again, he even forgot about how he said that the meal was his treat, so Lan WangJi ended up paying for them anyway. This was why it was only natural for him to forget such a detail.

He didn't know why but, all of a sudden, he really, really wanted to see Lan WangJi's face.

"... Senior, Senior Mo!"

"Hmm?" Wei WuXian finally pulled himself together. Lan SiZhui whispered, "The old lady's door… has opened."

From somewhere came an eerie gust of wind, faintly opening the room's door. The door swayed open and closed, revealing the vague outline of a stooping shadow sitting by a table within the frightful darkness. Wei WuXian signalled for them to stay put and walked into the room alone.

The dim light of the oil lamp and candlesticks in the central chamber leaked inside. The old woman sat with her head hung low, as if she didn't notice that someone had entered. A cloth lay on her knees, tightly stretched with an embroidery frame, suggesting that she was doing needlework. Her two hands stiffly stuck to each other as they tried to guide a thread through a needle.

Wei WuXian sat down by the table as well, "Manager, why not light the lamp if you're threading a needle? Let me help."

He took over the needle and thread—the thread went through at once. Passing it back to the old woman, he walked out of the room as if nothing had happened and closed the door behind him, "There's no need to go in."

Jin Ling, "When you were inside, did you see if the hag's actually alive or not?"

Wei WuXian, "Don't call her a hag. That's quite rude. The old lady is a ' '."

The boys looked at one another. Lan SiZhui asked, "What is a living corpse?"

Wei WuXian, "From head to toe, everything seems to say that they're a corpse, but the person is actually living. That's what a living corpse is."

Jin Ling was shocked, "You're saying that she's still alive?!"

Wei WuXian, "Have you looked inside?"

"Yes."

“What did you see? What was she doing?”

“Threading a needle.”

“Did it go in?”

“... No.”

“Correct. She’s incapable of threading a needle. Dead people’s muscles are too rigid to perform complex actions such as threading needles. The marks on her face aren’t age spots, but '
. And she doesn’t need to eat, either. It’s only that she can breathe which makes her alive.”

Lan SiZhui, “B-but, the old lady is already quite elderly. A lot of old ladies have poor eyesight and cannot thread needles by themselves.”

Wei WuXian, “So I helped her. Did you notice the other thing, though? From opening the door until now, she hasn’t blinked even once.”

The boys blinked a few times. Wei WuXian continued, “Living people blink to prevent eyes from becoming sore. Dead people, on the other hand, have no need to do this. And, when I took the needle and thread over, did anyone notice how she looked at me?”

Jin Ling, “Her eyeballs didn’t move… but her head did!”

Wei WuXian, “Precisely. When most people look somewhere, their eyeballs usually move, no matter how slight the movement is. However, dead people’s eyes don’t. This is because dead people can’t carry out an action as subtle as moving their eyeballs. They can only turn their heads and necks instead.”

Lan JingYi was baffled, “Should we be taking notes?”

Wei WuXian, “A good habit, but do you think you’d have time to flip through your notes when you’re out night-hunting? Keep it in your minds.”

Jin Ling spoke through clenched teeth, “Walking corpses are already weird enough. Why do things like living corpses exist?!”

Wei WuXian, “There are a lot of disadvantages to dead people: rigid muscles, slow movement, and so on. However, there are also quite a few advantages: the lack of fear towards pain, the

inability to think, how easy they are to control. Somebody thought that they could amend for the disadvantages of corpses and create perfect corpse puppets. This was how living corpses came into being."

Although the boys didn't say anything, one single sentence was written all over their faces—"This person must be Wei! Wu! Xian!"

Wei WuXian didn't know whether to laugh or frown, thinking silently, /
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Although, it really did sound like his way of doing things!

He carried on, "Ahem. Alright. Wei WuXian started it. But, he successfully made Wen Ning, or the Ghost General. To be honest, I've always wanted to ask—who exactly came up with this title? It's so dumb. Anyways, there were some other people who wanted to imitate this but weren't good enough, so they used improper means. Targeting living people instead, they developed living corpses." He concluded, "A type of failed imitations."

Hearing Wei WuXian's name, Jin Ling's face froze over. He snorted, "Wei Ying himself used improper means."

Wei WuXian, "Yep. Then, the ones who developed living corpses used the most improper means of all improper means."

Lan SiZhui, "Senior Mo, what should we do now?"

Wei WuXian, "Some living corpses may not know that they're already dead. I think that this old lady is one of the confused corpses. Let's just not disturb her for now."

Out of blue, a series of the crisp taps of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground suddenly sounded.

The sound came from nearby a window, which was sealed shut by strips of black, wooden boards. All of the disciples in the central chamber turned pale. Ever since they entered the city, they had been constantly pestered by the sound. They now panicked whenever they heard it. Wei WuXian gestured for them to be quiet. All of them held their breaths as they watched Wei WuXian walk to the window and look outside through a narrow slit between the boards.

As soon as Wei WuXian approached the slit, he could see a field of white. He thought that the fog outside was too thick for him to see anything. Suddenly, however, the whiteness rapidly shrunk backward.

He saw a pair of white, hideous eyes, glowering at the slit between the boards. The field of white he saw wasn't fog, but the pair of pupil-less eyes.

Translator's Notes

: This is another honorific, where the Japanese honorific came from.

' : This has been used to mean "moving corpse" in past chapters. It will now refer to this specific type of corpse. In apologies for all of you having to memorize yet another phrase, here is a spreadsheet that compiles most of the important terminology: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a9FyU-53VTTRZ_QkNMtIAq1ld61r8YPzw0g-Vu_jY3A/edit?usp=sharing

' : Livor mortis is a settling of the blood in the dependent portion of the body after death, causing a purplish red discoloration of the skin (which means that the old lady died with her face down/being the dependent portion of her body) (Wikipedia).

Chapter 36 Grasses—Part Four

Jin Ling and the group felt that their hearts were about to jump out of their chests, as they feared that something would happen to Wei WuXian as he was looking outside and that he would collapse with his hands covering his eyes. With an of exclamation coming from him, the boys' hearts skipped a few beats. Even their hair seemed to be standing, "What happened?!"

Wei WuXian spoke as quietly as he could, "Shh. Don't talk. I'm looking at it."

Jin Ling lowered his voice so that it was even quieter than Wei WuXian's, "Then what are you seeing? What's the thing outside the door?"

Wei WuXian neither took his gaze away nor gave a straightforward answer, "Hmmm… Yes… This is amazing. Truly amazing."

The expression that could be seen from the side of his face was filled with delight, and both his praise and exclamation sounded as though they were from the bottom of his heart. The disciples' curiosity immediately overrode their nervousness. Lan SiZhui couldn't help but ask, "... Senior Mo, what is truly amazing?"

Wei WuXian, "Wow! It's so pretty. Be quiet, you guys. Don't scare it away. I'm not done looking at it."

Jin Ling, "Move! I want to see."

"Me too!"

Wei WuXian, "Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

Wei WuXian took his time stepping aside, as if he was unwilling to leave. Jin Ling was the first to move over. He looked outside through the thin slit between the wooden boards.

It was already nighttime. In the cold atmosphere, even the fog in Yi City had somewhat dissipated, just barely allowing one to see the street at a few meters away. Jin Ling peeked for a while. Failing to find the "amazing", "pretty" thing, he was rather disappointed, thinking to himself, "

Just as he was about to give up, a small, shrivelled figure suddenly flashed before the slit.

Having seen the entire appearance of the entity without any preparations, Jin Ling's scalp prickled from the shock. He almost bursted out but, somehow suppressing the exclamation that was still in his chest, he actually managed to stay silent, and maintained the stiff, bent-down posture. After the tingles above his head had passed, he turned to Wei WuXian in spite of himself. Wei WuXian, the root of the commotion, leaned on the window beside the door. With one corner of his mouth curving upward, he raised his eyebrows and gave Jin Ling a sly smile, "Doesn't it look pretty?"

Jin Ling glared back at him. Knowing that he was making fun of them on purpose, Jin Ling grit his teeth, "... Yes…"

With a change of heart, he straightened up and casually replied, "It's so-so at best. Only barely worthy of a look!"

After the comment, he moved aside, waiting for the next person to be fooled. Their deceiving words roused the rest of the group's level of curiosity to a peak. Lan SiZhui couldn't hold himself from staying still and walked to the same spot. Just as his eyes approached the slit, he bursted out with an "ah!", but in all honesty, unlike the previous two. With a face full of panic, he jumped backward from the shock. He only found Wei WuXian after dizzily spinning around a few times, then complained, "Senior Mo! There is a… a…"

Wei WuXian responded in absolute awareness, "There's a , right? No need to say it out loud, else it'd no longer be a pleasant surprise. Let everyone go see for himself."

It was impossible for the others to still dare go over after they saw Lan SiZhui's terrified reaction. A pleasant surprise? More like a nasty fright. All of them waved their hands in refusal, "No thanks. No thanks."

Jin Ling spat, "The situation's already like this and you're still playing tricks. Just what in the world were you thinking?"

Wei WuXian, "You joined me as well, didn't you? Don't imitate your uncle's tone. SiZhui, was it scary?"

Lan SiZhui obediently nodded, "Yes."

Wei WuXian, "That's good. This is an excellent opportunity for your cultivation. Why do ghosts scare people? It's because when people are scared, their consciousness fades while their spirit

surges, which make the easiest moments to suck out their yang energy. This is why ghosts are the most afraid of those who are fearless, who aren't scared of them. There are no opportunities to seize, so there isn't anything that ghosts can do to them. Thus, as disciples of cultivation, your number one goals are to become braver!"

Glad that he didn't take a curious look due to his inability to move, Lan JingYi muttered, "Braveness is determined at birth. What can you possibly do if you were born a coward?"

Wei WuXian, "Were you born knowing how to fly on swords? People only know how to do it after practicing and practicing. Similarly, people can get used to things after being scared. Does the outhouse reek? Is it disgusting? Trust me, if you live in an outhouse for a month, you'll even be able to eat your meals in there."

The boys were absolutely terrified. They dismissed the claim in unison, "No you cannot!!! That is impossible!!!"

Wei WuXian, "It's only an example. Okay, I admit that I haven't lived in an outhouse before. I don't know if you can actually eat in there. I have no evidence. However, you must try the one outside the door. You must not only look at it but, moreover, look carefully. Watch for the details. From the details, find any hidden weaknesses in the shortest time possible. You must take the situation calmly and search for chances to counter-attack. Alright, have I said enough for you to understand? Most people wouldn't have the opportunity for my guidance. Make use of it. Nobody move any further away. A single-file line, please. Look one at a time."

"... Do we really have to?"

Wei WuXian, "Of course. I never joke around. I never fool people, either. Let's start with JingYi. Both Jin Ling and SiZhui have looked already."

Lan JingYi, "What? I would not have to look, would I? People under corpse poisoning cannot move. You said so yourself."

Wei WuXian, "Let me see your tongue. Ah."

Lan JingYi, "Ah."

Wei WuXian, "Congratulations. You have been cured. Bravely make your first step forward. Come on!"

Lan JingYi, "I have been cured already?! You are kidding, right?!"

With his protests denied, he could only toughen up and walk toward the window. He looked once, then looked away. He looked once more, then looked away again. Wei WuXian knocked on the board, “What are you scared of? I’m standing here. It won’t break through the board, much less eat your eyeballs or anything.”

Lan JingYi jumped away, “I’m finished looking!”

And then, whenever someone’s turn came, there’d be sharp gasps of fright. After everyone went, Wei WuXian spoke again, “Finished looking? Then, everyone, tell the group what details you’ve picked up. Let’s summarize.”

Jin Ling fought to speak first, “White eyes. Female. Short and skinny. Fine looks. Holding a bamboo pole.”

Lan SiZhui thought for a moment, “The girl’s height reaches my chest. She is only wearing rags and does not look too clean, dressed like a beggar roaming the streets. The bamboo pole appears to be a white cane. It is possible that her white eyes were not formed after death, but instead because she had been blind before she passed away.”

Wei WuXian commented, “Jin Ling had greater quantity, while SiZhui had higher quality.”

Jin Ling’s lips twitched in dissatisfaction.

One boy spoke up, “The girl is only around fifteen or sixteen. She has an oval face, with a lively air about her delicate features. She fastened her long hair with a wooden hairpin, which had a small fox head carved onto the end. She’s not only small—her figure is slender as well. Although she’s not that tidy, she’s not grimy either. After some grooming, she’s bound to be a lovely girl.”

Hearing this, Wei WuXian immediately felt that this boy would have a very promising future. He vigorously praised, “Well done, well done. The observations are both detailed and unique. Child, you’ll definitely be the sentimental type after you grow up.”

The boy blushed and turned to face the wall, ignoring his peers’ laughter. Another boy spoke, “It looks like that the sounds of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground were from when she was walking. If she had been blind before she passed away, she would not have been able to see even after she became a ghost, so she could only rely on the white cane.”

Another one of the boys argued, “But how would that be possible? You have all seen blind people, have you not? Because they cannot use their eyes, they move and walk slowly, in case

they bump into anything. However, the ghost outside the door has swift movements. I have never seen such a nimble blind person before."

Wei WuXian smiled, "Good job. Props to you for thinking about this. This is exactly how you should analyze. Don't dismiss any points of suspicion. Now, let's invite her inside to get some answers."

As soon as he finished his sentence, he immediately took off one of the boards. Not only the boys inside, even the ghost outside the window jumped from his sudden movement, warily raising her bamboo pole.

Wei WuXian first greeted the ghost, then asked, "Maiden, do you have any business here, having followed them all this way?"

The girl widened her eyes. If she were a living person, she must have looked as adorable as can be. However, with no pupils and only two streaks of blood pouring from her eyes, it only made her look scarier than ever. Some more people in the back had gasped. Wei WuXian comforted them, "What are you scared of? You're gonna get used to seeing people bleeding from the seven / in the future. It's only two of the seven that are currently bleeding, and you can't handle it? This is why I tell you to experience more things and toughen up."

Before this, the girl had been irritatedly circling in front of their window, knocking on the ground with her pole, stomping her feet, glaring at everyone, waving her arms around. Now, however, her actions changed. She gestured, as if she wanted to express something. Jin Ling wondered, "Strange. Can't she talk?"

Hearing this, the girl's ghost paused, then opened her mouth.

Blood gushed out from her empty mouth. Her tongue had been pulled out from its root.

The disciples were covered in goosebumps, yet they felt a same sense of sympathy, 2 " " / 4 "

Wei WuXian, "Is she using sign language? Does anyone understand?"

Nobody understood. The girl was so anxious that she stomped her feet, using her pole to write and scribble on the ground. Yet, she clearly wasn't from a scholarly family. She was illiterate and couldn't write anything. With only a mess of stick-figures, no-one could understand what she was trying to say.

Suddenly, from the far end of the street came a series of sprinting footsteps and human pants.

The girl's spirit suddenly disappeared. She'd probably come back again, though, so Wei WuXian wasn't worried. He quickly put the board back and continued peeping outside from the slit. The rest of the disciples wanted to see the situation outside as well, and all squeezed in front of the door. A row of heads stacked from the top to the bottom, blocking the entire slit.

Although the fog had thinned for a while, at the moment, it started to circulate again. A figure clumsily broke through the fog and rushed over.

The person was dressed in black. As if he had been injured, he staggered as he ran. A sword hung by his waist, which was also enveloped in black cloth. Lan JingYi whispered, "Is he the mist-faced man?"

Lan SiZhui whispered back, "Probably not. The mist-faced man had entirely different moves from this person."

A group of walking corpses followed the person. Moving quickly, they soon caught up to him. The person faced the attacks by unsheathing his sword. Its bright, limpid sword glare sliced the fog open. Wei WuXian silently cheered, $

However, after the attack, the strange yet familiar spurts sounded again. The black-red powder shot out from the corpses' severed limbs. The person was surrounded by them. With nowhere to hide, he stood where he was, and was immediately engulfed by the powder. Lan SiZhui was shocked by the scene. He urged in a hushed voice, "Senior Mo, this man, we…"

Another group of walking corpses went over and surrounded the person. The circle shrank smaller and smaller. His sword slashed out again, and more corpse-poisoning powder bursted out. He breathed in more of the powder as well, appearing as though he was already beginning to lose his balance. Wei WuXian spoke up, "We need to help him."

Jin Ling, "How do you intend on helping him? We can't go over there now. The corpse-poisoning powder is everywhere. You're gonna get poisoned if you go near."

After a moment of thinking, Wei WuXian left the window and walked inside the central chamber. The boys couldn't help but follow him with their eyes. Differently-postured paper mannequins stood silently between the two wreaths. Wei WuXian strode in front of them, and stopped in front of a pair of female mannequins.

Each of the paper mannequins looked different. Yet, this pair seemed as if they were purposely made to be two twin sisters. Their makeup, clothes, and features were all the exact same. With curved brows and smiling expressions, one could almost hear their “hee-hee” laughter. They wore double-buns, red earrings, gold bracelets, and embroidered shoes, closely resembling a pair of maids from a wealthy family.

Wei WuXian, “How about these two?”

He lightly brushed his hand against a boy’s unsheathed sword, producing a cut on his thumb. Turning around, he smeared two pairs of eyes, four pupils, onto the mannequins.

Then, he took a step backward. With a faint smile, he chanted, “Eyes behind thy long lashes, lips parted, smiling in tease. Mind not the good or evil, with smeared eyes I summon thee.”

Out of the blue, a chilly breeze drifted across the entire shop. The boys couldn’t help but tightly grip their swords.

All of a sudden, the twin mannequin sisters suddenly trembled.

The next moment, giggles of “hee-hee” really came out of their brightly tinted lips!

It was the 3 $!

As if they saw or heard something hilarious, the pair of paper mannequins giggled incessantly. At the same time, the eyes painted with human blood spun rapidly inside their sockets. The sight was truly stunning, but also truly frightening. Standing before them, Wei WuXian lowered his head in salutation.

With respect, the pair of paper mannequins also bowed slightly, returning salutations of a higher level.

Wei WuXian pointed outside the door, “Take the living person back inside. Other than him, eliminate everything.”

Shrill laughter emerged from the mouths of the paper mannequins. An eerie gust of wind threw the doors open!

Side by side, the two mannequins swept outside and into the circle of walking corpses. It was beyond belief how, although they were mannequins made from pieces of paper, they had such strong powers. With dainty shoes and drifting sleeves, they severed the arm of a corpse with one

swish of their hands, then severed half of a head with another—it was as if the paper sleeves had been turned into keen blades. The flirtatious giggles continued to echo through the entire length of the street, bringing about both horror and allure.

Not long afterward, the fifteen or sixteen walking corpses had been chopped into broken chunks that lay limply on the ground!

The two paper maids gained a complete victory. Obeying the command, they carried the weakened escapee inside. Then, as they jumped outside again, the doors closed on their own. Each of them guarded each side of the entrance as if they were lion statues that guarded estates, and finally quieted down.

The disciples inside the room were shocked speechless.

They had only seen and heard the descriptions of improper cultivation methods from books and their own seniors. At the time, they couldn't understand it, "
" " " " ! %
And, now, after they had seen it with their own eyes, they finally realized the fascination around these sorts of practices. Moreover, this was only the tip of the iceberg—the "Summoning of Painted Eyes". Thus, after the boys got over the initial shock, there were no signs of repulsion on their faces, but instead excitement that couldn't be concealed. They felt that it enriched their experiences, allowing for more conversations between their juniors and them. Jin Ling was the only one who didn't look too well.

Lan SiZhui went over to help Wei WuXian with the stranger. Wei WuXian spoke, "Nobody come near. Be careful not to touch the corpse-poisoning powder. It's possible that even physical contact would poison you."

When the person was carried inside by the paper mannequins, he was already in a state of only half-consciousness, appearing as if there was only little energy left of him. Now, though, his mind had become clearer. He coughed a few times, covering his mouth with his hand as though to prevent any powder that he had coughed up from affecting other people. He spoke in a low tone, "Who are you?"

The voice sounded extremely tired. He asked the question not only because he didn't know who the people in the room were, but also because he couldn't see anything.

A thick layer of white bandages wrapped around the man's eyes. He was probably blind.

And, not to mention, he was both blind and relatively good-looking. With a high nose bridge and thin lips that had the hue of a soft red, he could almost be described as handsome. He looked quite young as well, somewhere between a boy and a man, naturally gaining the sympathy of anyone who came across him. Wei WuXian wondered to himself,

" / A

Suddenly, Jin Ling called out, “Hey. We still don’t know who he is, whether he’s friend or foe. Why should we save him without taking any considerations? If he’s a bad guy, then wouldn’t we be letting a snake in?”

Although this was indeed the case, it sounded rather awkward when spoken in such a frank tone right in front of the person himself. Strangely, the person wasn’t angered and didn’t appear to be worried that he’d be thrown out at all. He smiled, revealing the small tips of two canine teeth, “Young Master, you’re very right. It " be best if I leave.”

Not expecting this sort of reaction at all, Jin Ling paused for a second. With no idea what to say, he hastily snorted. Lan SiZhui hurried to mediate between the two, “But it is also possible that he is not a bad person. No matter what, not helping a dying person is against our sect’s rules.”

Jin Ling stubbornly continued, “Fine. You’re the good guys. If someone dies, it’s not my fault.”

Lan JingYi fumed, “You…” Before he could finish his sentence, it was as if the cat got his tongue.

It was because he saw the sword that the man propped up against the table. The black cloth wrapped around it had somewhat fallen off, and the body of the sword could be seen.

The sword was forged with unequaled skill. The sheath was in the color of bronze, with intricate patterns of frost hollowed out. Through the patterns, the body of the sword shone through as if it was made of silver stars, glistening with snowflake-shaped flecks of luminescence. There was a pure yet bright sense of beauty to it.

Lan JingYi widened his eyes, as if he was about to blurt something out. Even though Wei WuXian didn’t know what he wanted to say, since the man covered his sword with black cloth, he clearly didn’t want it to be seen. Instinctively not wanting to alert the stranger, he covered Lan JingYi’s mouth with one hand and put the index finger of his other hand to his lips, signalling for the similarly astonished boys to make no sounds.

Jin Ling mouthed two characters at him, then used his hand to write the two characters on the dust-covered table:

“Shuanghua”

… The Shuanghua sword?

Wei WuXian mouthed his question, & " 42

Jin Ling and the rest nodded in confirmation.

The boys had never seen Xiao XingChen himself, but “Shuanghua” was both rare and well-known. It was not only strong in spiritual power, but also looked stunningly intricate. It had been illustrated as part of countless versions of sword catalogues, which was why everyone knew of it. Wei WuXian pondered, " 2

One of the boys thought of this as well. He couldn’t help but reach out toward the bandages wrapped around person’s eyes, in hope of taking them off so that he could see if his eyes were still there or not. Yet, just as his hand touched the bandages, a pained expression appeared on the person’s face. He inched backward slightly, as though he was scared of his eyes being touched.

Noticing his own rudeness, the boy immediately took his hand away, “Sorry, sorry… It wasn’t on purpose.

The person raised his left hand, which wore a thin, black glove. He wanted to cover his eyes, but was afraid to do so. It was probably that even a light touch brought about unbearable pain—a thin layer of sweat had already appeared on his forehead. He managed with difficulty, “It’s fine…”

His voice, though, trembled faintly.

With such behavior, one could almost ascertain that this person was Xiao XingChen, who had disappeared after the case of the YueyangChang Clan.

Xiao XingChen didn’t know that his identity had been exposed yet. After the pain had passed, he felt around for Shuanghua. Wei WuXian quickly pulled the black cloth that had fallen off back on. With Shuanghua in his hand, Xiao XingChen nodded, “Thanks for the help. I’ll take my leave.”

Wei WuXian, “Stay here for now. You’re under corpse poisoning.”

Xiao XingChen, “Is it severe?”

Wei WuXian, “Quite so.”

Xiao XingChen, “If it’s severe, then what is the point of staying? It’s long past hope, anyways. Why not kill a few more corpses before I become one as well?”

Hearing how he didn’t care for his own life, the boys felt their blood burn with indignation. Lan JingYi bursted out, “Who said that you are long past hope? Stay here! He will cure you!”

Wei WuXian, “Me? Sorry, but were you talking about me?” He really couldn’t speak the truth—Xiao XingChen had already breathed in too much of the corpse-poisoning powder. With a dark red hue to his complexion, he was most likely too ill for rice congee to work.

Xiao XingChen, “I have already killed a number of corpses in this city. They kept on following me and new ones would join shortly after old ones died. If I stay, you’ll be drowned in an ocean of corpses, either sooner or later.”

Wei WuXian, “Do you know why Yi City became this way?”

Xiao XingChen shook his head, “No. I’m only a roaming cul… roaming around the area. I heard about the strange events here and decided to night-hunt in the city. You haven’t seen how many, how powerful the living and walking corpses here are. Some move too quickly to take precautions against. Others, when killed, release corpse-poisoning powder that poisons people upon touch. However, if you don’t kill them, they would pounce on you and attack. Both result in poisoning, which makes it truly difficult to deal with. Judging from your voices, there are quite a few young masters in your group, right? It’s best if you leave as soon as possible.”

Just as he finished his sentence, the sinister giggles of the mannequin sisters came from outside the door. This time, the laughter was sharper than ever.

Translator’s Notes

0 : This has been mentioned in the past. See the vocabulary sheet if you find yourself having memory loss.

3 $: This originated from the story of a man who added pupils to the painting of a dragon, and the dragon became real. The incantation here is partly from He SiCheng’s poem—Meeting a Beauty in Nanyuan. Since he’s not a well-known poet and it’s not a well-known poem, it hasn’t been translated to English yet. Thus, although I spent quite a long

time on it, the translation here is definitely not professional or even anywhere near perfect. Major thanks to Tracy for helping me.

Chapter 37 Grasses—Part Five

Lan JingYi looked out through the door slit, then immediately blocked it with his body, “Th-th-there are so many of them!”

Wei WuXian, “Walking corpses? How many is so many?”

Lan JingYi, “I do not know! They fill the entire street—possibly hundreds! And more are coming! I do not think the mannequins can hold them off any longer!”

If the mannequins outside failed to guard the doors, all of the corpses on the street would rush into the shop. If they were killed, one would be under corpse poisoning and, when struggling to fight, the poison would circulate quickly; if they were not killed, one would be ripped and bitten to death. Holding his sword, Xiao XingChen got ready to leave, most likely in the hopes of doing as best as he could with all that was left of his strength. However, his face suddenly flushed purple, and he stumbled to the ground.

Wei WuXian spoke, “You can just sit back and relax. It’s going to be over soon.”

Again, he cut the index finger of his right hand on Lan JingYi’s sword. Droplets of blood trickled down.

Lan JingYi volunteered, “Are you going to use the Summoning again? If you dot twice in each mannequin’s eyes, how much blood are you going to use? Do you need me to give you some?”

Immediately, a few other boys rolled up their sleeves, “I can also spare some…”

Wei WuXian couldn’t decide whether to laugh or sigh, “It’s okay. Are there any blank talismans?”

The disciples were still fairly young, not yet at a level of cultivation that allowed them to write runes on-spot. Thus, all of the talismans that they carried with them had already been written with runes.

Lan SiZhui shook his head, “No.”

Wei WuXian wasn’t too concerned, “Already-written ones are fine as well.”

Lan SiZhui took out a stack of yellow talismans from a Qiankun Pouch, yet Wei WuXian only grabbed one of them. After taking a rough look at it, with the middle and forefinger of his right hand put together, he scrawled from top to bottom, above the cinnabar runes that were already there. The crimson blood and the vermilion cinnabar formed a new set of runes. With a flick of Wei WuXian's wrist, the yellow talisman and the red runes hovered in the air and ignited on their own. Wei WuXian reached out his left hand to catch the sprinkling ashes. Then, he closed his fingers into a fist and lowered his head slightly. As he opened his hand again, he softly blew the black ashes toward the row of paper mannequins. He breathed, "*
7 8"

The ashes whirled around the room.

The Nether Brawler who stood in front of all others suddenly picked up the hacking saber by his feet and carried it over his shoulder.

A lady, wearing a tall bun and fine robes, slowly raised her right hand. Her slender fingers twirled nimbly, as though she was a languid noblewoman, insouciantly appreciating her long, blood-red nails. By the lady's side, there stood , —a pair of child servants. The boy playfully tugged at the girl's braid, while the girl stuck out her tongue at him. A tongue almost nine inches long rapidly stretched out from within her mouth, stabbing a large hole in the boy's chest as if it were a snake. After the violent attack, it shrunk back at once. The boy opened his mouth wide, revealing two rows of ghastly, white teeth, and bit into her arm. With this, the two paper children started a fight of their own.

One by one, the dozens of paper mannequins started to teeter. As if they were stretching their limbs, they jolted as they whispered to one another. The rustling noises rose and fell all around them. They were not human, but better than humans.

Wei WuXian, "Hold your breaths."

After his words, he moved away, leaving the path to the door open. With a slight bow, he made a gesture of invitation.

The wooden doors sprang open again. The sickeningly sweet stench of the corpse-poisoning powder poured into the room, and the disciples immediately covered their faces with their sleeves. With a booming shout, the Nether Brawler charged outside. The rest of the mannequins followed.

The doors shut itself behind the last paper mannequin. Wei WuXian asked, "Nobody breathed it in, right?"

Everyone replied negative. Wei WuXian helped Xiao XingChen up, intending to find a place for him to lie down. However, since there wasn't any, he could only sit on the cold, dust-covered ground. Xiao XingChen was still gripping Shuanghua tightly. Finally waking up from the semicoma, he coughed a few times, then spoke in a weak manner, "Was that… the Summoning of Painted Eyes?"

Wei WuXian, "I know a thing or two."

After some thought, Xiao XingChen smiled, "Yes… To eliminate these walking corpses, it was indeed the best method."

With a pause, he continued, "However, this path of cultivation can easily lead to the backfiring of one's ghosts and spirits. Even the founder of the path, the YiLing Patriarch, couldn't avoid such an end. I suggest for you to be more careful and refrain from using this unless you're in dire situations. You can cultivate some other paths…"

Wei WuXian sighed silently, "Thank you for your advice."

Most famous cultivators would take clear-cut stands on the matter, drawing distinct lines that showed their absolute hatred toward the certain someone. Yet, his youngest shishu still tried to persuade him, even when he himself was only half-alive, and warned him of the backfire. He truly was a tender-hearted person, both gentle and kind. Seeing the thick layer of bandages wrapped around Xiao XingChen's eyes and thinking of the things he had been through, Wei WuXian couldn't help but sympathize with him.

Usually, only young, relatively inexperienced disciples would feel a greater sense of curiosity than loathing toward these sorts of improper paths. Aside from Jin Ling, who kept up an expression of contempt, all others were crammed in front of the door slit as they watched the fight, "Oh my… The mannequin woman's nails are so scary! One scratch and there are five lines."

"Why is the little girl's tongue so long and so hard? Is she a hanged ghost?"

"The man is so strong! How can he lift up so many corpses at once? He's gonna drop them on the ground! Look, look! He dropped them! They broke!"

After he finished listening to Xiao XingChen's good-natured words, Wei WuXian picked up the last bowl of leftover rice congee, "The poison has already worked its way around. The things in

this bowl may slow it down, but may also not work at all, not to mention that it tastes really bad. Do you want to try? If you don't want to live, then nevermind what I said."

Xiao XingChen took over the bowl with both hands, "Of course I do. If I can live, there's no reason not to."

Yet, after he had just one mouthful, the corners of his mouth started to twitch. He only stopped himself from spitting it out by tightly pursing his lips together. A moment later, he replied with respect, "Thank you."

Wei WuXian turned around, "Did you see that? Did you see that? What did he say? You guys are the only ones who have such high standards, so full of complaints even after eating my congee."

Jin Ling, "Your congee? What else did you do, apart from adding a bunch of weird things into the pot?"

Xiao XingChen, "But, now that I think about it, if I had to eat this every single day, I'd rather die."

Jin Ling laughed at him without holding back at all. Even Lan SiZhui couldn't stop himself from bursting with a "pfft". Speechless, Wei WuXian turned to look at them, and Lan SiZhui put on a straight face at once. Lan JingYi spoke up, his voice full of delight, "Finished. All of them have been killed. We won!"

Xiao XingChen put his bowl down right away, "Don't open the door just yet. Be careful. More might still come…"

Wei WuXian, "Don't put down the bowl. Pick it up and drink everything." With that, he approached the wooden doors and peeked through the slit. After the inhuman battle, thin fog and powder in the color of a purplish red pervaded the entire street. The corpse-poisoning powder was beginning to dissipate and the group of paper mannequins calmly inspected the path. Among the corpse pieces that covered the ground, when there was any that could still move, they would step on it mercilessly, until pools of muddied flesh were all that was left.

Aside from this, all was silent. At the moment, no new corpses came.

Just as Wei WuXian was about to relax, a series of almost imperceptible noises came from above him.

The noises were extremely difficult to pick up. It was as if somebody was walking rapidly above the roof. However, since the person's movements were abnormally light, the sound of their footsteps was close to unnoticeable. Wei WuXian only caught the slight noises of collision between the roof tiles due to his keen senses. Of course, since he was blind, Xiao XingChen noticed the noises as well. He cautioned them, "From the above!"

Wei WuXian shouted, "Disperse!"

As soon as he said it, a large hole was smashed through the ceiling of the central chamber. Dust, grasses, and broken roof tiles rained down from the top. It was fortunate that most of the disciples had already scattered around, thus nobody was hurt. A black figure leaped down from the opening in the roof.

The man wore black cultivational robes. With a tall stance and a straight back, he had the air of a firm pinetree. A horsetail whisk was strapped to his back and a long sword was held in his hand. His face, although handsome, tilted upward slightly, suggesting a haughty, aloof personality.

Yet, there were no pupils within his eyes, only deathly fields of

white. It was a fierce corpse!

As soon as everyone determined this fact, he launched an attack with his sword in his hand.

He aimed his attack at Jin Ling, who was the closest to him. Jin Ling defended with his sword. The power that came with the attack was so strong that his arm almost numbed. If it wasn't for the immense spiritual powers of his own sword, Suihua, it might have broken and he might have died on the spot. With a failed first attack, the black-clothed corpse attacked again. His movements were smooth and natural, while his attacks were sharp and ruthless. This time, he lunged at Jin Ling's arm. Under desperation, using his sword, Xiao XingChen defended the attack for Jin Ling. Possibly because the corpse poisoning broke out again, he finally collapsed.

Lan JingYi panicked, "Just what exactly is he, dead or alive?! I have never seen a…"

A corpse with such high speed and fine swordsmanship!

He didn't finish his sentence, because he remembered that he seen one before.

The Ghost General was also like this!

Wei WuXian watched the cultivator with utmost attention. Thinking quickly, he pulled out the bamboo flute by his waist and played a shrill, ear-piercing long tone. It was so painful to listen to that everyone who was present covered his ears. As the cultivator heard the sound, despite how his figure reeled and his hands trembled, he still attacked at Wei WuXian!

He couldn't be controlled. This corpse had a master!

The sword was as fast as thunder, yet Wei WuXian dodged it. As they brushed past, he calmly played another tune. A split second later, the mannequins patrolling outside also hopped onto the roof and jumped down through the hole. Sensing that something was wrong, the corpse stabbed twice with his right arm, vertically slicing two of the mannequins into four halves. With his left hand, he pulled out his whisk. It was as if the thousands of soft, white strands turned into the poisonous spikes on a mace, slashing and piercing with each whip. If it accidentally touched someone, they would sure be turned into a bloodied sieve.

In the midst of multitasking, Wei WuXian managed, "Nobody come here. Be good and stay in the corners!"

After his words, he immediately returned to commanding the corpses. The flute sounded vivacious at times, while vehement at other times. Though the cultivator used both hands and attacked with strong hostility, paper mannequins ceaselessly dropped from the roof, encircling him with attacks. When he fought one side, more came on the other; when he killed the ones in front, there'd be more behind him. It really was impossible to deal with everything at once. Suddenly, a Nether Brawler shot down from above and landed on him, holding him on the ground with a foot on his shoulder.

Immediately afterward, three more Nether Brawlers jumped down from the opening and slammed onto his body one by one.

In legends, Nether Brawlers had incredible strength. When craftspeople made them, some things were usually added onto their bodies to increase their weight. After being possessed by roaming spirits, each was heavier than the next. Simply one of them would be as heavy as a mountain.
With four on him at once, he'd be doing well if his guts didn't gush out. Thus, the robed corpse was securely held down onto the ground by the four Nether Brawlers.

Wei WuXian walked over and found that an area on the back of his clothes had been torn. Soothing it out, he noticed that there was a wound, both thin and narrow, near his left shoulder blade. He commanded, "Turn him over."

The four Nether Brawlers proceeded to turn the cultivator over. With his front on the upside, it was easier to inspect. Wei WuXian brushed the finger with the cut near each of their lips as awards. With crimson tongues made of paper, the Nether Brawlers slowly licked the blood beside their lips, as if they truly cherished the delicacy. Only then did Wei WuXian look down again and continue his inspection. On the cultivator's left chest, near his heart, there was a similar tearing, a similar thin, narrow wound. It seemed as if he died with a stab through the heart.

The corpse had been struggling as hard as he could. Low growls came out of his throat and ink-colored blood trickled from the corners of his lips. Wei WuXian pinched his cheeks and forced him to open his mouth. Inside, his tongue had also been pulled out from the root.

Blind eyes, detached tongue. Blind eyes, detached tongue.

Why did these two traits appear so often?

After a while of observation, Wei WuXian began to feel that the corpse was similar to Wen Ning when he had been controlled by the black nails. With the thought, he felt around the corpse's temples and, as he had expected, he really found two metal points!

This type of long nails were used to control high-level fierce corpses so that they'd lose consciousness and the ability to think for themselves. Without knowing the corpse's identity and character, Wei WuXian decided that he shouldn't rashly pull the nails out, but instead interrogate him first. However, since his tongue was no longer there, even if the corpse regained consciousness, he wouldn't be able to talk.

Wei WuXian asked the disciples from the Lan Sect, "Have any of you studied ?"

Lan SiZhui raised a hand, "Me. I have."

Wei WuXian, "Have you brought your guqin?"

Lan SiZhui, "Yes." At once, he took out a simplistic guqin, the wood of which still looked bright, from his Qiankun Pouch.

Seeing that the guqin was fairly new, Wei WuXian asked, "How is your / ? Have you had actual experience? Will the spirit that you summon be able to lie?"

Lan JingYi interjected, "HanGuang-Jun said that SiZhui's qin language is fine."

If Lan WangJi said that it was “fine”, then it must be fine. He wouldn’t exaggerate or understate the matter, and so Wei WuXian ceased to worry. Lan SiZhui added, “HanGuang-Jun told me to focus on quality instead of quantity. The spirit that I summon will be able to avoid answering, but will not be able to lie. So, if it is willing to answer, then it will definitely speak the truth.”

Wei WuXian, “Then, let’s start.”

The guqin was laid horizontally before the cultivator’s head. Lan SiZhui sat on the ground, his robes spreading neatly around him. Having tried a few notes, he nodded. Wei WuXian began, “The first question: who is he?”

After some thought, Lan SiZhui silently chanted the incantations, and was finally ready to play the first sentence.

A moment later, the strings of the guqin vibrated. Two notes rumbled out, sounding as if a rock had exploded.

Lan SiZhui widened his eyes. Lan JingYi urged him, “What did he say?”

Lan SiZhui, “Song Lan!”

… Xiao XingChen’s most intimate friend of cultivation, Song Lan?!

In unison, everyone turned their heads toward Xiao XingChen, who lay unconscious on the ground. Lan SiZhui whispered, “Does he know that the one who came is Song Lan…?”

Jin Ling also lowered his voice, “Probably not. He’s blind, while Song Lan is mute, and even became a fierce corpse who lost his senses… It’s best if he doesn’t know.”

Wei WuXian, “The second question: who killed him?”

In all earnesty, Lan SiZhui played another sentence.

This time, the silence was three times longer than the one before.

Just as they were about to conclude that Song Lan’s soul wasn’t willing to answer this question, the strings of the guqin vibrated three times, their tones echoing grief.

Lan SiZhui blurted out, “That is impossible!”

Wei WuXian, “What did he say?”

Lan SiZhui replied as though he couldn’t believe what he had just heard, “He said… Xiao XingChen.”

The one who killed Song Lan was Xiao XingChen?!

They asked a mere number of two questions, yet the answers to those questions were more than shocking. Jin Ling was skeptical, “You played it wrong, right?”

Lan SiZhui, “But ‘who are you’ and ‘who killed you’ are the two easiest and most common questions of . When someone first starts to learn , these are the first and second sentences that they learn. One would practice them no less than a thousand times. I checked them before I played. I definitely did not play them wrong.”

Jin Ling, “Either you played wrong, or you interpreted the qin language wrong.”

Lan SiZhui shook his head, “If playing them wrong is impossible, then interpreting them wrong is even more impossible. The name and the three characters of ‘Xiao XingChen’ are not at all common in the spirits’ answers. If he answered a different name and I interpreted it wrong, it would not have just happened to be this name.”

Lan JingYi murmured, “... Song Lan went to find the missing Xiao XingChen, yet Xiao XingChen killed him. Why would he kill a good friend? He does not seem like this sort of person.”

Wei WuXian, “Let’s not worry about this for now. SiZhui, ask the third question: who is controlling him?”

With a stern face, Lan SiZhui didn’t even dare to breathe as he played the third sentence. All pairs of eyes stared at the strings of the guqin, waiting for Song Lan’s answer.

Lan SiZhui interpreted the reply word by word, “The. One. Behind. You.”

Everyone spun around as fast as they could. Xiao XingChen, who lay collapsed on the ground a few moments ago, had already sat up, with one hand holding his chin. Giving them a smile, he raised the left hand that was covered by a black glove and snapped.

When the crisp sound travelled to Song Lan’s ears, it was as though it exploded right beside him. Song Lan suddenly threw off all of the four Nether Brawlers who had been holding him down!

He leaped up at once. Wielding his sword and whisk again, with both of his hands, he slashed twisted the paper mannequins into colorful pieces of confetti, which drifted toward the ground. His sword pressed against Wei WuXian's neck, while his whisk threateningly pointed to the disciples.

Within the mere area of the shop, the situation had changed drastically.

Jin Ling put his hand onto his sword. Catching the movement with a sideway glance, Wei WuXian immediately stopped him, "Don't move. Don't add to the trouble. In terms of swordsmanship, even everybody together wouldn't be a worthy opponent to this… Song Lan."

His body was low in spiritual power and his sword wasn't by his side. Moreover, there was also Xiao XingChen—it remained undetermined what he intended on doing or whether he was friend or foe.

Xiao XingChen, "Adults are going to talk to adults. The children can wait outside."

He gestured to Song Lan, who obeyed at once and drove the disciples outside. Wei WuXian comforted them, "Go outside for now. You won't be much help here, anyways. The corpse-poisoning powder should've settled already. When you go outside, don't run around and stir up the dust again. Breathe slowly."

Hearing "you won't be much help here", Jin Ling was both unconvinced and upset. He didn't want to accept the defeat, yet he knew that he couldn't do anything, so he stormed outside. Before Lan SiZhui left, he looked as if he wanted to say something. Wei WuXian turned to him, "SiZhui, you're the most sensible one here. Guide them a bit, won't you? Can you do that?"

Lan SiZhui nodded. Wei WuXian added, "Don't be scared."

Lan SiZhui, "I am not."

"Really?"

"Really." Lan SiZhui smiled, "Senior, you are so much like HanGuang-Jun."

Wei WuXian was puzzled, "Us? How are we alike?" They were obviously like fire and ice. However, Lan SiZhui only grinned in reply, and led the rest of the group out.

He continued his thought silently, " 1
" " "

Xiao XingChen took out a red elixir from somewhere and put it into his mouth, “How touching.”

After he ate it, the purplish-red hue of his face faded immediately. Wei WuXian asked, “Cure of the corpse-poisoning powder?”

Xiao XingChen, “Correct. A lot more effective than your scary bowl of congee, right? And it tastes sweet.”

Wei WuXian, “Your performance was wonderful. From courageously killing corpses, tiring out, to blocking the sword for Jin Ling, losing consciousness. They were all for our entertainment?”

Xiao XingChen raised a finger and wagged it in front of his face, “Not for ‘your’ general entertainment, but ‘your’ singular entertainment. I’ve been looking forward to meeting you, the YiLing Patriarch, that is. It’s better to see for oneself rather than listening to mere tales.”

Wei WuXian didn’t react to his words and his expression remained unchanged. Xiao XingChen continued, “I’m guessing that you haven’t yet told anyone who you really are, have you? So, I didn’t expose your secret either and told them to go outside for us to shut the doors and converse in privacy. How’s that? Aren’t I thoughtful?”

Wei WuXian, “All of the walking corpses in Yi City are under your control?”

Xiao XingChen, “Of course. Just as you guys came in and your whistles started, I began to think that you were a bit weird, which was why I decided to attend to the matter personally and sound you out. As I expected, someone who could give way to such strong powers with the low-level sorcery of the Summoning of Painted Eyes could only be the founder.”

Xue Yang walked his old path. Since it was the same practice, both using improper means, Wei WuXian couldn’t fool him. Wei WuXian asked, “So, taking the group of children as hostage, what do you want me to do?”

Xiao XingChen laughed, “Senior, I want you to do me a favor. A tiny favor.”

His mother’s shidi was calling him a senior. The generations really didn’t match up. Just as Wei WuXian was chuckling in secret, Xiao XingChen took out a Spirit-Trapping Pouch and put it onto the table, “Please.”

Wei WuXian put his hand over the the pouch and felt it for a while, as if he was feeling someone's pulse, "Whose soul is this? It's already in shambles. Even glue won't be able to stick it together. There's only one breath of life left."

Xiao XingChen, "If this person's soul was that easy to stick together, why would I need your help?"

Wei WuXian took his hand away, "You want me to fix this soul? No offense, but there really isn't much left of it in here. When they were still alive, the person probably suffered from a lot of torture. It should've been rather painful. They probably committed suicide, so they probably don't want to come back to this world. If a soul itself doesn't have any desire to live, then it'll most likely be impossible to save. If I'm not wrong, the soul was probably patched up by force. As soon as it leaves the Spirit-Trapping Pouch, it'll dissipate at any moment. You understand this more than anyone."

Xiao XingChen, "I don't understand and I don't care. Even if you don't want to, you'll have to do me the favor. Senior, don't forget that your children are still staring at you from outside, waiting for you to help them out of the danger."

The tone that he spoke in sounded quite odd. It was affectionate, almost sweet, but had a vicinity that arose from nowhere. It was as though one moment he could call you brother and senior, and the next he could turn hostile and kill you instead. Wei WuXian laughed, "I, too, would rather meet you in person instead of listening to the tales. Xue Yang, why are you pretending to be a cultivator instead of being the delinquent you truly are?"

With a pause, "Xiao XingChen" raised his hand and took off the bandages around his eyes.

The bandages fell layer by layer, revealing a pair of bright, shining eyes.

A pair of unscathed eyes.

He had young, likeable features, almost handsome. However, the canine teeth that appeared when he smiled were cute to a point of childish, stealthily concealing the untamed cruelty within his eyes.

Xue Yang tossed the bandages to the side, "Uh-oh. You found out."

Wei WuXian, "Purposely pretending that the pain is unbearable so that our consciences won't allow us to take off your bandages and see; purposely showing us some of Shuanghua; purposely blurting out that you're a roaming cultivator by accident. You knew of not only how to make

yourself appear injured and defenseless, but moreover how to gain the sympathy of others. You truly brought out a genuine, virtuous Xiao XingChen. If not for how you were aware of more things than you should, I really would've believed that you were him."

And, during , the answer that Song Lan gave for the second question was "Xiao XingChen", while the answer for the third one was "the one behind you".

If "the one behind you" was also Xiao XingChen, Song Lan wouldn't have needed to express it in another way.

Unless, Xiao XingChen and "the one behind you" wasn't the same person at all. Song Lan wanted to warn them of how dangerous the person behind them was, but if he simply answered Xue Yang, it was possible that they didn't know who he was. He could only answer as such.

Xue Yang grinned, "Well, it's true that his reputation is better than mine. Of course I pretended to be him. It's easier to gain the trust of others this way."

Wei WuXian, "That was some excellent acting right there."

Xue Yang, "Now you're just flattering me. I have a very famous friend. His acting is what I'd call excellent. I still have a long way to go. Anyways, enough with the chit-chat. Senior Wei, you really have to do me the favor."

Wei WuXian, "You're the one who made the long nails that controlled Song Lan and Wen Ning, aren't you? You can even restore half of the Stygian Tiger Seal, so why would you need my help to restore a soul?"

Xue Yang, "They're not the same. You're the founder. If you never made the first half of the seal, I wouldn't have been able to make the second half all on my own. There's no doubt that you're better than me. So if there's something I can't do, you must be able to do it."

Wei WuXian really couldn't understand why strangers always had an inexplicable sense of confidence in place of him. He touched his chin, unsure of whether or not they should pass a few compliments between each other out of respect, "You're being too humble."

Xue Yang, "It's not being humble. It's the truth. I never like to exaggerate when I'm talking. If I say I'm gonna kill someone's entire clan, I'll actually kill their entire clan. I won't even leave a dog behind."

Wei WuXian, "For example, the YueyangChang Clan?"

Before Xue Yang had the opportunity to answer, a black-robed shadow swept inside.

Wei WuXian and Xue Yang stepped back in unison and left the table. Xue Yang quickly snatched the Spirit-Trapping Pouch. Lightly pressing his hand against the table, Song Lan flipped as he was midair and landed on top of it. After he steadied, he quickly turned to look at the door. Black streaks of blood climbed over his cheeks.

With iron chains following behind him, Wen Ning broke through the door from amid the white fog and chilly winds.

While he was playing the the first tunes on the flute, Wei WuXian had already given the commands for summoning Wen Ning. He ordered, “Fight outside. Be careful not to beat him up too badly. Watch the living people and don’t let any other corpses approach them.”

Wen Ning raised his left hand, and one of the chains swung over. As Song Lan faced the attack with his whisk, it collided with the chain and the two twisted together. Wen Ning pulled on the chain and backed away. Song Lan didn’t let go either, and was dragged outside the door. The disciples had already hid inside another shop near this one, every one of them stretching his neck and staring fixedly at the scene. With the horsetail whisk, the iron chains, and the long sword, it was a frenzy of clanks and clashes. They could see that a battle between two fierce corpses was intense indeed. Each move was ruthless, each attack was fatal—only two corpses could fight in such a brutish way. If two living humans fought like this, they would’ve already been nothing more than severed limbs and battered flesh!

Xue Yang, “Guess who’s gonna win?”

Wei WuXian, “Would I need to guess? Wen Ning, of course.”

Xue Yang, “It’s such a shame that even though I gave him so many nails in his head, he was still unwilling to obey. Things that are too loyal are also quite troublesome.”

Wei WuXian replied in an indifferent tone, “Wen Ning is not a thing.”

Xue Yang laughed, “Don’t you see that what you said could be interpreted in a different way?” As the “be” came out of his mouth, he suddenly unsheathed his sword and attacked.

Wei WuXian darted to the side, “Do you often sneak up on people when you’re in the middle of a sentence?”

Xue Yang's voice was filled with surprise, "Of course. I'm a delinquent, aren't I? I'm sure you know already. Anyways, it's not that I want to kill you. I just want to make it so that you can't move. Then I can take you back and you can take your time repairing the soul for me."

Wei WuXian, "I've already said that I can't do anything about it."

Xue Yang, "Don't be so eager to refuse me. If you don't know what to do about it, the both of us can discuss the matter together." Before he finished his sentence, he lunged once more. Wei WuXian dodged and dodged again, surrounded by ragged strips of paper that covered the ground. He thought to himself, 3 Watching Xue Yang's attacks become greater in both speed and lethality, Wei WuXian couldn't help but exclaim, "Are you really taking advantage of my body's low spiritual power?"

Xue Yang, "That's right!"

Wei WuXian had finally met someone more shameless than him. He returned the smile, "It'd be better for one to upset a hero than to upset a rogue, which is you, in this case. I'm not dealing with you any longer. Let's have someone else."

Xue Yang grinned, "Who else? That HanGuang-Jun? I got more than three hundred walking corpses to gang up on him. He…"

Before he finished his sentence, a white-robed figure descended from the sky. Bichen's icy blue glare swept at him.

Translator's Notes

* 7 8 : This is taken from Bai JuYi's poem, - . http://www.chinese-poems.com/bo4.html was used as reference when translating this phrase.

, : This is a proverb in China, referring to the servants of a heavenly place.

0 : This refers to the language of the guqin. Each note, combined with different timbre, volume, tonality, etc., means a different Chinese character. Of course, this is mostly fictional.

Chapter 38 Grasses—Part Six

Surrounded by an ambience of frost and ice, Lan WangJi stood in front of Wei WuXian. Xue Yang fended the attack by casting out Shuanghua. The two swords collided, then flew back to their respective owners. Wei WuXian commented, “Isn’t this called ‘to come in time is better than to come early’?”

Lan WangJi, “Yes.”

As their exchange finished, they turned back to fighting with Xue Yang. A few moments ago, Wei WuXian was chased around by Xue Yang, but now, Xue Yang was driven around by Lan WangJi. In reaction to the adverse situation, with a roll of his eyes and a grin on his face, he tossed Shuanghua to his left hand. His right hand shifted inside his sleeve. Wei WuXian was concerned that he might hurl poisonous powder or hidden knives from the / ' . However, he simply pulled out another sword, and seamlessly adjusted to a double-sworded style of attack.

The glare of the sword that he pulled from his sleeve was grim and dark. As it was wielded, it almost seemed to emit a black aura, creating a stark contrast with Shuanghua’s silver radiance. Using both swords equally well, Xue Yang’s hands kept in perfect time with each other. He gained the upper hand at once. Lan WangJi questioned, “Jiangzai?”

Xue Yang, “Hmm? HanGuang-Jun, you know of this sword? What an honor.”

“Jiangzai” was Xue Yang’s own sword. As its name and as its owner, it was a foreboding sword that brought with it bloodshed. Wei WuXian interrupted, “The name matches you perfectly.”

Lan WangJi, “Step back. You are not needed here.”

Thus, Wei WuXian humbly listened to the suggestion and stepped back. When he got to the door, he looked outside. Expressionless, Wen Ning was gripping Song Lan by the neck. He lifted him into the air and slammed him onto the wall, creating a large man-shaped dent. Similarly expressionless, Song Lan grabbed Wen Ning’s wrists. With a backflip, he threw him onto the ground. Both corpses fought expressionlessly, ceaselessly smashing and banging. Since neither of them felt pain or feared injury, unless they were cut into pieces, they would continue to fight even if they lost a limb or two. Wei WuXian muttered under his breath, “I don’t think I’m needed here, either.”

Suddenly, he saw that Lan JingYi, inside a dimly-lit shop, was frantically waving to him. He beamed, #

Just as he left, Bichen's sword glare brightened tenfold. With a brief slip of the hand, Shuanghua flew out of Xue Yang's grip. Lan WangJi conveniently caught the sword. Seeing that Shuanghua was in someone else's hands, Xue Yang had Jiangzai slash directly at the left arm that Lan WangJi used to grab the sword. As the attack was dodged, a chilling rage flashed within Xue Yang's eyes. He demanded coldly, "Give me the sword back."

Lan WangJi, "You do not deserve this sword."

Xue Yang made a bitter sound of laughter.

On the other hand, Wei WuXian walked over to the disciples. Surrounded by the boys, he inquired, "Everyone alright?"

"Yes!"

"We all listened to you and held our breaths."

Wei WuXian, "Good. If anyone doesn't listen to me, I'll feed him congee again."

The few boys who had encountered the taste pretended as if they were vomiting. Suddenly, the sounds of footsteps came from all around them. Shadows had already begun to emerge from the end of the street. Lan WangJi heard the sound as well. With a wave of his sleeve, he took out his guqin, Wangji.

The body of the guqin was horizontally slammed onto the table. Lan WangJi tossed Bichen to his left hand and continued to fight with Xue Yang, his attacks remaining strong. At the same time, without even turning his head, he raised his right hand and strummed across the strings.

The chord was loud and clear. It resonated all the way to the end of the street. What came back was the strange yet familiar noises of the corpses' heads bursting. Lan WangJi continued to fight Xue Yang with one hand and play the guqin with the other. He'd glance across the scene as if it was only a simple matter, then nonchalantly curve his fingers to strum again. Working with both of his hands, he somehow still seemed calm and unhurried.

Jin Ling blurted out in spite of himself, "He's so good!"

He had seen Jiang Cheng and Jin GuangYao go on night-hunts and kill beasts, which made him think that his two uncles were the two most powerful cultivators in the entire world. Toward Lan WangJi, though, he had always felt more fear than respect, especially toward his technique of silencing others and his cold temper. However, at the present moment, he couldn't help but admire Lan WangJi's abilities. Lan JingYi approved, "Well, obviously. Of course HanGuang-Jun is good. He just never likes to show it off. He is very low-key, right?"

The "right?" was directed at Wei WuXian, who replied in confusion, "Are you asking me? Why are you asking me?"

Lan JingYi was on the verge of being angered, "So you think that HanGuang-Jun is not good?!"

Wei WuXian touched his chin, "Hmm. He's good. Of course. He's really good. He's the best." As he talked, he couldn't help but break into a smile.

The dangerously terrifying night was finally about to pass—dawn was almost here. However, this wasn't the best of news. If daylight came, the fog would also become thicker. Then, they'd again be unable to do a thing!

If there were only Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi, it wouldn't be as difficult. But with so many living humans around, if they end up surrounded by a large group of walking corpses, escape would be close to impossible. As Wei WuXian urgently tried to think of a solution, the crisp tip-taps of the bamboo pole sounded once more.

The ghost of the blind-eyed, tongue-less girl came again!

Without any hesitation, Wei WuXian ordered, "Go!"

Lan JingYi, "Where to?"

Wei WuXian, "Follow the sounds of the bamboo pole."

Jin Ling was somewhat surprised, "You want us to follow a ghost? Who knows where she'll take us to!"

Wei WuXian, "That's precisely what you're going to do. The sound has been following you guys ever since you came, correct? You were trying to go into the city, but she was leading you toward the city gates, where you ran into us. She was chasing you out—she was trying to save you!"

The strange, sporadic sounds of the bamboo pole were a technique that she used to scare people who entered the city. The Nether Brawler's head that Wei WuXian stepped on was possibly also placed there by her to startle and alert them. Wei WuXian continued, "And, last night, she clearly wanted to tell us something really important, but couldn't explain it. However, she disappeared as soon as Xue Yang came. She was most likely trying to avoid Xue Yang. Anyways, she definitely isn't on the same side as him."

"Xue Yang?! Why is Xue Yang here as well? Wasn't it Xiao XingChen and Song Lan?"

"Uhh, I'll explain that later. Anyways, the one fighting with HanGuang-Jun inside isn't Xiao XingChen, but Xue Yang, who pretended to be him."

The bamboo pole's noises continued, as if the girl was waiting or urging them. If they followed her, they could fall into a trap; if they didn't follow her, they'd be surrounded by corpses who release corpse-poisoning powder. It wouldn't be much safer. The boys decisively chose to follow the knocking sounds along with Wei WuXian. Sure enough, as they moved, the sounds also moved. At times, they could see a small, vague shadow amid the thin fog in the distance, but sometimes there was nothing at all.

After running for a while, Lan JingYi spoke up, "So we are just going to run off like this?"

Wei WuXian turned around and shouted, "HanGuang-Jun, it's up to you now. We're gonna go ahead!"

The strings of the guqin vibrated, as if someone was saying "mnn". Wei WuXian cracked up with a . Lan JingYi hesitated, "That was it? You are not going to say anything else?"

Wei WuXian, "What else do you want me to do? What else should I say?"

Lan JingYi, "Why did you two not say 'I'm worried about you. I'm staying!', 'Go!', 'No! I'm not going! If I'm going, you're going with me!'? Is it not a must?"

Wei WuXian was left open-mouthed, "Who taught you this? Who told you that this sort of conversation must happen? It'd sound fine out of my mouth, but can you even imagine your HanGuang-Jun say such things?"

The Lan Sect's juniors chorused, "No…"

Wei WuXian, “Right? It’s a waste of time. I believe that someone as reliable as HanGuang-Jun will definitely be able to deal with it. I can just focus on my own things and either wait for him to find me or go find him myself.”

They followed the bamboo pole’s noises for less than fifteen minutes. After a few twists and turns, in front of them, the noises abruptly came to a halt. Wei WuXian extended his arm, stopping the boys behind him, and walked a few steps forward. A house stood alone in the fog that grew thicker and thicker.

“Squeak…”

Somebody pushed open the door to the house, which silently awaited the entrance of the strangers. Wei WuXian felt that something must be inside. It wouldn’t be anything dangerous or that could kill them, but something that would tell him things and show them the answers.

He turned to the disciples, “We’ve already come this far. Let’s go in.”

He raised his foot and stepped into the house. Adjusting to the dark, he cautioned without looking back, “Watch for the threshold. Don’t trip.”

As he had expected, one of the boys almost tripped over the tall threshold. He complained, “Why is the threshold so high? It is not a temple or anything like that.”

Wei WuXian, “It’s not a temple, but it’s somewhere that also needs a high threshold.”

Hustling about, they lit up around a dozen fire talismans. The orange light of the wavering flames illuminated the entire house.

Straws were scattered on the ground, serving as a carpet. In the frontmost area, there was an altar and a few fallen stools of different heights. A small, unlit room was on the right side. Other than these, there were also seven or eight black, wooden coffins.

Jin Ling, “This is the so-called coffin home? Where dead people are temporarily put?”

Wei WuXian, “That’s right. Corpses that aren’t claimed by anyone, that would make a house ominous, or that are waiting to be buried are often put into coffin homes. It could be described as a for dead people.” The smaller room on the side was probably where the person who guarded the coffin home rests.

Lan SiZhui asked, “Senior Mo, why is the threshold to the coffin home so high?”

Wei WuXian, “In case any corpses transform.”

Lan JingYi puzzled, “Would making a high threshold be able to prevent corpse transformation?”

Wei WuXian, “It can’t prevent corpse transformation, but it can sometimes prevent low-level corpses that have already transformed from going outside.” He went to stand in front of the threshold, “Say, for example, I’m dead and I just transformed.”

The boys nodded. He continued, “Since I just transformed, my limbs are really stiff, right? And I can’t perform certain actions?”

Jin Ling, “That goes without saying. You can’t even walk. You can’t step forward, so you can only jump…” At this point, he immediately understood.

Wei WuXian affirmed, “Correct. I can only jump.” With both of his feet together, he tried to jump outside. However, since the threshold was too high, he failed every attempt. Seeing how his toes bumped into the threshold, all of the disciples found the scene funny. They started laughing as they imagined a a corpse who had just transformed desperately try to jump outside like this, but get blocked by the high threshold every time. Wei WuXian spoke again, “Do you see now? Don’t laugh. This is the intelligence of common folk. Although it’s lame and seems too simple, it’s indeed effective against low-level corpses. If a corpse who has transformed is tripped by the threshold, after they fall on the ground, with their stiff body, they won’t be able to get back up in a short time. When they’re finally able get up, either the sun will rise soon afterwards and the rooster will call, or the person guarding the coffin home will’ve discovered them. It’s actually quite impressive how ordinary people who didn’t cultivate could think of such a solution.”

Although Jin Ling had laughed at the scene as well, now that he heard the explanation, he stifled his laughter at once, “Why did she bring us to a coffin home? Don’t tell me that it was because we won’t be surrounded by walking corpses if we’re here. Where did she go herself?”

Wei WuXian, “It’s likely that we really won’t be. We’ve been standing still for so long already. Has anyone heard any walking corpses?”

Just as he finished speaking, the ghost of the young girl appeared on top of a coffin.

Due to Wei WuXian’s persuasion, all of them had already seen what the girl looked like. They had even seen how she looked with bleeding eyes and a mouth without a tongue. So, now that they saw her again, nobody felt scared or uneasy. It could be seen that, precisely as what Wei

WuXian had said, one would become braver and face situations with better composure after being frightened a couple of times.

The girl didn't have physical form, only a spiritual body surrounded by a soft, dim aura. Both her figure and her face were small. After some grooming, she'd become just the charming girl-next-door. However, from how she sat with her legs apart, she didn't look delicate at all. The bamboo pole that she used as a white cane leaned on the coffin. Her two legs hung down, anxiously swinging to and fro.

As she sat on the coffin, she used her hand to tap on the lid. She then hopped down and circled around the coffin a few times, making hand gestures at them. This time, the gesture was rather easy to understand. It was the action of "opening" something. Jin Ling guessed, "She wants us to open this coffin for her?"

Lan SiZhui suggested, "Would it be that her body is inside of here? She may want us bury her and bring her peace." This was the most logical inference, since one of the most common reasons why plenty of ghosts haunted the Earth was that their corpses weren't buried. Wei WuXian stood on one side of the coffin, while a few boys stood on the other, intending to help him open it.

He reassured them, "You don't have to help me. Stand further back. What if it's not a corpse and spurts out some more corpse-poisoning powder at you?"

He opened the coffin alone and lay the lid onto the ground. Looking down, he saw a corpse.

However, it wasn't the corpse of the girl, but somebody else instead.

It was a young man. He had been put into a peaceful position with his hands folding crisscrossed together, beneath of which rested a horsetail whisk. On his body was a cultivational robe as white as snow. The silhouette of the lower half of his face, along with a pale countenance and soft-colored lips, was handsome and refined. The upper half of his face, though, was enfolded in layers and layers of bandages that totalled a width of four fingers. Under the bandages, nothing protruded from where his eyes should've been. The bandages sunk in instead. There weren't eyes, only two empty hollows.

Having heard them open the coffin, the girl stumbled over. She stuck her hands into the coffin and, after some searching around, she finally felt the corpse's face. Stomping her feet, tears of blood trickled down from her blind eyes again.

Everyone understood, without the need of any words or gestures. Placed all alone inside of a coffin home that stood all alone, this corpse was the real Xiao XingChen.

Ghost tears were incapable of dripping down. After the girl cried for a while, she suddenly stood up and -ed at them through her clenched teeth. Appearing both angered and irritated, it was as though she really wanted to express her thoughts. Lan SiZhui asked, “Should I play again?”

Wei WuXian, “There’s no need. It’s possible for us to ask the wrong questions, instead of the questions that she wants us to ask. And, I think that her reply will be quite complex, quite difficult to interpret.”

Although he didn’t say “you might not be able to do it”, Lan SiZhui still felt rather ashamed. He silently promised to himself, # " Inquiry " " , - '. Lan JingYi asked, “Then what should we do?”

Wei WuXian, “How about Empathy?”

All of the major sects specialized in various methods of gaining information and searching for material on ghosts. Empathy was the one that Wei WuXian was the best at. His method wasn’t as profound as those of the other sects. Everyone could use it. It was simply to ask the ghost to possess his own body. Using his own body as medium, he could invade the spirit’s soul and memory, hear what they heard, see what they saw, feel what they felt. If the spirit’s emotions were abnormally strong, then he’d be affected by their sorrow, their rage, their ecstasy. Thus, it was called “Empathy”.

One could say that this was the most straightforward, most convenient, and most effective method. Of course, it was even more so the most dangerous method. Everyone feared and avoided chances for ghosts to possess their body. On another level, Empathy, though, was playing with fire. The slightest mistake happened, and it would backfire. If the ghost went back on their word and used the opportunity to counter-attack, even the best result would be the seizure the Empathizer’s body.

Jin Ling protested, “That’s too dangerous! Using such a dark technique without someone…”

Wei WuXian broke him off, “Okay, okay. We’re running out of time. Stand up properly. Quick. We still have to go back and find HanGuang-Jun after we’re finished. Jin Ling, you’ll be the supervisor.”

A supervisor was an indispensable part of the Empathy ritual. In case the Empathizer lost themselves in the ghost’s emotions, they needed to settle on a code with the supervisor. It was

best if the code was a sentence or a voice that the Empathizer was familiar with. The supervisor must preside over the scene at all times. If they saw that the situation had changed, they'd need to act at once and pull the Empathizer out of the trance. Jin Ling pointed to himself, "Me? You want a young mast-… You want me to supervise you while you do something like this?"

Lan SiZhui, "If Young Master Jin does not want to do it, I can do it as well."

Wei WuXian, "Jin Ling, did you bring the Jiang Sect's silver bell?"

The silver bell was a signature accessory of the YunmengJiang Sect. When Jin Ling was young, he was brought up by two sects. He lived at the LanlingJin Sect's " % half the time, and the YunmengJiang Sect's Lotus Pier the other half, so he should be carrying belongings from both sects. As Wei WuXian had expected, with a complicated expression on his face, he pulled out a small, simplistic bell. The Jiang Sect's clan motif, the nine-petaled lotus, was carved onto the silver body of the bell. Wei WuXian stared at the bell for a few moments. Sensing that he looked a bit off, Jin Ling asked, "What?"

Wei WuXian replied, "Nothing." He passed the bell to Lan SiZhui, "The silver bell of the Jiang Sect can steady one's focus and calm one's mind. Use this as the code."

Jin Ling grabbed the bell back, "Actually, I'll do it!"

Lan JingYi grumbled, "You did not want to do it, and now you do want to do it. With such a hot-and-cold temper, are you a young mistress?"

Wei WuXian turned to the girl, "Come in."

The girl wiped her eyes and her face, and crashed into his body. Her entire soul was slammed inside. Leaning against the coffin, Wei WuXian slowly slid to the ground. The boys hurried to drag over a pile of straw for him to sit on. Jin Ling clutched the bell tightly, his thoughts unknown.

When the girl had just slammed into him, Wei WuXian suddenly thought of a problem, 3
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3 " ? " " "

After a few dizzying moments, the soul that had been light felt as though it landed on firm ground. As the girl opened her eyes, Wei WuXian opened his eyes as well. However, the scene before his eyes wasn't a field of pitch-black, but instead a clear landscape with bright colors.

He could see!

Seemingly, at the time of this piece of memory, she wasn't blind yet.

During Empathy, the scenes shown to Wei WuXian would be segments of her memory with the strongest emotions and that she most wanted to express to other people. He could simply watch quietly and feel what she felt. At the moment, the two of them shared the same senses. The girl's eyes were his eyes; the girl's mouth was his mouth.

Sitting by a brook, the girl groomed herself in front of the water. Although her clothes were tattered, she still needed the most basic level of cleanliness. Tapping a tempo with the tip of her foot, she hummed as she fixed her hair, as though she wasn't satisfied no matter how she fixed it. Wei WuXian could feel a thin, wooden hairpin poking around in her hair. Suddenly, she looked down at her reflection in the water. Wei WuXian's viewpoint lowered as well. A young maiden with an oval face and a sharp chin was mirrored against the water of the brook.

There were no pupils within the maiden's eyes, only a field of white.

Wei WuXian wondered, 3 " "

After the girl fastened her hair, she dusted her clothes and leaped up. Grabbing the bamboo pole by her feet, she skipped along the road. She swung her pole as she walked, ceaselessly swatting at the branches above her head, knocking at the rocks that she passed, scaring the grasshoppers within the bushes. As soon as somebody approached from afar, she immediately stopped skipping. Properly holding onto her pole, she knocked on the ground as she slowly wandered forward, appearing quite wary. The group that came was a few villager women. Seeing her situation, they all moved out of her way and whispered to one another. The girl nodded with hurry, "Thank you, thank you."

One of the women seemed as though she felt sorry for her. Lifting the white cloth that covered her basket, she took out a steamed bun and gave it to her, "Sister, be careful. Are you hungry? Take this and eat it."

The girl -ed and replied thankfully, "How can I take it? I-I…"

The woman shoved the bun into her hand, "Take it!"

She finally took it, "Sister, A-Qing is very thankful of you!"

So the girl's name was A-Qing.

Bidding the villager women farewell, A-Qing finished the bun in just a few bites, and continued to skip along, hopping three inches high each time. Skipping with her inside of her body, Wei WuXian's head spun from dizziness. He thought to himself, 3
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Being a girl who roamed the streets alone, if she pretended to be blind, people would naturally think that she really couldn't see and lower their guard. However, in reality, she could see everything. This allowed her to adjust according to the circumstances and was indeed a clever method of self-protection.

Despite this, A-Qing's soul was truly blind, which meant that she did lose her sight before she died. Then, how did she go from pretending to be blind to being actually blind?

Was it that she saw things she shouldn't have seen?

When nobody was around, A-Qing skipped along; when people were around, A-Qing shrunk down and pretended to be blind. Pausing now and then, she arrived at a marketplace.

Since it was bustling with people, of course she'd show off her skills. Performing to the fullest, she knocked on the ground with her bamboo pole, her act as believable as ever. Slowly walking through the crowd, she suddenly ran into a middle-aged man dressed in bright, expensive-looking clothes. She pretended as though she was frightened, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I can't see. I'm sorry!"

She couldn't see? She clearly rushed right into the man!

Having collided with someone, the man turned angrily around, as if he wanted to curse at whoever was in front of him. However, seeing that it was not only a blind person, but also a young maiden who looked rather pretty, if he slapped her face in the streets, he'd definitely be criticized by the passerby. He could only scold, "Watch where you're going!"

A-Qing continued to apologize. As he was about to leave, he still wasn't satisfied, and squeezed A-Qing's buttocks with his right hand. Since they felt the same things, it was as though the squeeze landed on Wei WuXian's body. Instantaneously, Wei WuXian felt as if a blanket of goosebumps climbed over his heart. He wanted no less than to slam the man into the ground.

A-Qing shrunk herself into a ball as if she was deeply frightened. However, after the man was some distance away, she tapped her way into an obscure alleyway, and immediately spat on the

ground. Fishing out a money pouch, she poured the contents out, counted them, then spat again, “Those lousy men, all of them are like this. Dressed as if they really are something, but they don’t have any coins. You can’t even shake a penny out of them.”

Wei WuXian was halfway between frowning and bursting into laughter. A-Qing was still young, possibly younger than fifteen-years-old, but she was already quite adept at cursing, and even more adept at snatching people’s money. He reminisced, "
" / " "

Just as he was sighing about how he became so poor, A-Qing had already found her next target. Acting as a blind person, she walked out of the alleyway, wandered on the streets for a while, and did the same thing. With an “ah”, she drove herself into a white-robed cultivator, then apologized, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry! I can’t see. I’m sorry!”

Wei WuXian silently shook his head. This young beauty didn’t even change her lines!

Having been jolted by her, the person turned around. He helped her steady herself first, “I’m fine. Maiden, you can’t see either?”

The person was fairly young. His cultivation robes were simple yet clean, and he carried a sword wrapped in white cloth on his back. The lower half of his face was quite handsome, although somewhat emaciated. On the other hand, the upper half of his face was covered with bandages about four fingers wide. A soft tinge of blood vaguely seeped from beneath the bandages.

Translator’s Notes

0 ' : Similar to a Qiankun bag, robes that have Qiankun sleeves are often worn by cultivators to carry things with them. This is what xianxia stories mean when someone takes something “out of their arms” or “out of their sleeves”.

: Courier stations were implemented in the past for couriers (or messengers) to relay letters to the next person when the distance was too long for one courier to make.

" % : Jinlin Tower has been mentioned a few times already, hasn’t it? The same as the Cloud Recesses and Lotus Pier, Jinlin Tower is where the LanlingJin Sect is situated. However, since the former two were translated without pinyin, I’m thinking about changing this one to English as well. Then again, Jinlin means “golden carp”, so it wouldn’t sound as pretty if it’s called “Carp Tower”. Any suggestions?

Chapter 39 Grasses—Part Seven

A-Qing seemed to have paused shortly before answering, “Y-yes.”

Xiao XingChen, “Then, walk a bit slower. Don’t be so fast. You wouldn’t want to bump into someone again, would you?”

He didn’t mention at all that he himself couldn’t see either. Holding A-Qing’s hand, he led her to the side of the road, “Walk here. There are less people.”

Both his words and his actions were gentle yet careful. A-Qing reached out with hesitation, but in the end, she still snatched away the money pouch that hung by his waist, “Brother, A-Qing is very thankful of you!”

Xiao XingChen, “Not Brother. It’s Daozhang.”

A-Qing blinked, “But you’re both Daozhang and Brother.”

Xiao XingChen smiled, “Then, since you call me Brother, why don’t you give back Brother’s pouch?”

No matter how quick a street-roamer like A-Qing was, they wouldn’t be able to fool the senses of a cultivator. Startled, she took her pole and sprinted as fast as she could. Yet, not having run very far, Xiao XingChen grabbed the back of her collar with one hand and brought her back, “As I’ve already said, you shouldn’t run so fast. What if you bump into someone again?”

A-Qing struggled to escape his grasp. With a twitch of her lips, her upper teeth bit down on her lower lip. Wei WuXian understood at once, ? @ $ Suddenly, a middle-aged man hurried out of a street corner. As he saw A-Qing, his eyes lit up at once. He stormed over as he cursed, “You little bitch. I’ve finally caught you. Give back my money!”

Simply cursing wasn’t enough to relieve his anger. With a wave of his arm, his hand swung toward her face. A-Qing immediately looked down and closed her eyes. Yet, before the slap landed on her cheek, it was stopped halfway through.

Xiao XingChen, “Sir, please calm down for a moment. It’s quite an impolite way to treat a young maiden, don’t you think?”

A-Qing secretly peeked from behind her eyelids. The middle-aged man clearly used a lot of strength, yet his hand was held by Xiao XingChen's in a seemingly light way, unable to move an inch. Although he was nervous, he accused stubbornly, "What is a blind guy like you doing here? Saving the damsel in distress? So the little bitch is your lover? Did you know that she's a thief? She stole my money! If you protect her, then you're also a thief!"

With him in one hand and A-Qing in the other, Xiao XingChen turned around, "Give the man his money back."

A-Qing fumbled out the small amount of money and passed it over. Xiao XingChen let go of the man, who counted the money. Everything was still there. Glancing at the blind cultivator again, the man knew that he'd be difficult to deal with, so he trudged awkwardly away.

Xiao XingChen, "You really are too bold. How do you dare steal things even when you're blind?"

A-Qing leaped up three inches high, "He touched me! He pinched my butt, and it hurt so much, so what's wrong with me taking some of his money? There's only so little inside of such a big pouch, and he's being a bully about it. He's gonna die flat broke!"

Wei WuXian disagreed, !
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Xiao XingChen shook his head, "Such being the case, you really should've known better than to provoke him. Today, if nobody was here, the matter wouldn't have been solved with a mere slap. Maiden, take care."

After he finished, he turned to the opposite direction and left. Wei WuXian observed, ,
3 " " "

Holding the money pouch that she stole, A-Qing stood and stared blankly for a few seconds. Suddenly, she stuffed it into her lapel, chased over with her pole, and crashed right onto Xiao XingChen's back. Xiao XingChen could only help steady her again, "Is there anything else?"

A-Qing, "I still have your money pouch!"

Xiao XingChen, "It's yours now. There's not much inside, anyways. Before you spend all of it, be sure not to steal anything else."

A-Qing, "I heard the filthy man curse. So you're blind too?"

Hearing the second sentence, Xiao XingChen's expression faltered at once. His smile disappeared as well.

The bold, innocent remarks of children were often the cruelest. Children didn't know anything. Precisely because they didn't know anything, they hurt people's feelings in the most direct of ways.

Under the bandages wrapped around Xiao XingChen's eyes, a smear of red grew darker and darker, almost seeping through the cloth. His raised his hand for it to hover over his eyes, while his arm trembled slightly. The pain and injury that came with gouging out one's eyes were not that easy to heal. However, A-Qing simply thought that he was feeling dizzy. She beamed, "Then let me follow you!"

Xiao XingChen managed to smile, "Why would you want to follow me? To become a cultivator?"

A-Qing, "You're tall and blind, and I'm small and blind. If we travel together, we can care for each other. My parents are gone and there's nowhere I can stay. I'll follow anyone to anywhere." Being as clever as she was, she was afraid that Xiao XingChen would refuse her, so she took advantage of his agreeable nature and threatened, "I spend money really quickly. If you refuse to take me with you, the money will be gone at once, and I'll have to go steal and trick people again. And then somebody will slap me hard and I'll fall down and I won't even be able to find my way. Poor me!"

Xiao XingChen laughed, "Someone as clever as you should be able to fool others so that can't find their way. Who in the world can do the same to you?"

After watching for a while, Wei WuXian found something interesting.

Now that he had seen Xiao XingChen himself, he discovered that, in comparison to the real one, Xue Yang's imitation really was precise! Aside from his face, all of the details were true to the real Xiao XingChen. If someone told him so, he could've even believed that Xiao XingChen had possessed Xue Yang's body.

Pleading, pestering, and pretending that she was pitiful, A-Qing clung to Xiao XingChen the whole way. Xiao XingChen warned her quite a couple of times that it'd be dangerous if she followed him, but A-Qing never listened. She wasn't even scared after Xiao XingChen exorcised an old cattle that had gained consciousness when they passed a certain village. She still kept on calling him "Daozhang" and stuck to him as if she was syrup, never going more than three

meters away from him. As she followed him, possibly deciding that A-Qing was quick-witted, brave, and never a hindrance all the while being a young, blind maiden with nowhere to go, Xiao XingChen finally gave tacit permission to her staying with him.

Wei WuXian originally thought that Xiao XingChen must have had a destination. However, as a few pieces of memory passed, judging from the climates and dialects, the places that they went couldn't at all form a distinct route. He didn't seem like he was going anywhere, but rather night-hunting by chance. He went to wherever people mentioned peculiar things were happening. Wei WuXian guessed, ! & & " ,
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At the moment, Xiao XingChen and A-Qing were walking along a long, flat road with weeds and grasses of waist height growing on both sides of it. Suddenly, A-Qing cried out with an . Xiao XingChen immediately asked, "What's wrong?"

A-Qing, "Ugh. Nothing. My ankle twisted."

Wei WuXian could clearly see that it wasn't because her ankle twisted at all. She was walking as fine as ever. If not for that she was pretending to be blind in front of Xiao XingChen so that he couldn't come up with any reasons to shoo her away, she could hop up to the heavens as she walked. A-Qing's exclamation was because as she glanced around, she suddenly saw a black figure lying among the bushes of weeds.

Although she didn't know whether he was dead or alive, most likely thinking that it'd be a drag either way, she obviously didn't want Xiao XingChen to find the person. She urged him, "Let's go, let's go. Let's rest a bit at that whatever city that's ahead. I'm so tired!"

Xiao XingChen, "Didn't you twist your ankle? Do you want me to carry you?"

A-Qing was ecstatic, knocking loudly on the ground with her bamboo pole, "Yes, yes, yes!" Smiling, Xiao XingChen turned around with his back to her and kneeled down with one leg. Just as A-Qing was about to throw herself over, Xiao XingChen suddenly stopped her. With a serious expression, he stood up, "Something smells like blood."

A-Qing could also smell a faint hint of blood. Amid the night wind, it was indeed discernible at times. She bluffed, "Really? Why can't I smell it? Are any families around the area killing livestock?"

Just as she finished speaking, as if Heaven wanted to go against her wishes, the person in the bushes coughed.

Even though the sound was almost imperceptible, it couldn't escape Xiao XingChen's ears. He immediately found the direction, stepped into the bushes, and squatted down beside the person.

Due to how Xiao XingChen discovered the person anyway, A-Qing stomped on the ground, then pretended to find her way over, "What happened?"

Xiao XingChen was feeling the person's pulse, "Someone is lying here."

A-Qing, "So that's why the smell of blood is so strong. Are they dead? Should we make a ditch and bury them?"

Of course, a dead person was less of a hassle than a living one, so A-Qing couldn't wait for the person to die. However, Xiao XingChen replied, "Not yet. He's just badly injured."

After giving it some thought, he gently carried the person onto his back.

Seeing that a filthy, bloodstained man took the position where she would've been and that Xiao XingChen wouldn't be able to carry her to the city anymore, A-Qing pouted and poked a few deep holes on the ground with her pole. Yet, she knew that Xiao XingChen wouldn't not help the person, so complaining wouldn't work anyway. They went back onto the road and continued walking. The more they walked, the stronger Wei WuXian's sense of familiarity grew. He suddenly recalled, % 6 ! &

Sure enough, Yi City could be seen looming at the end of the road.

As of this time, the city gates weren't as run-down. The tower was still in fair condition and there weren't any scribbles on the walls. Entering the city, the fog was somewhat denser, but compared to the unnatural density in later times, it was not a hindrance at all. On the sides of the road, lights and even human conversations leaked from the doors and windows of houses. Although it was an obscure place, it had some liveliness to it.

Carrying a person with severe injuries and drenched in blood on his back, Xiao XingChen definitely knew that no shops would let someone like him inside. Thus, he didn't search for places to rest, but instead directly asked a night watchman who walked by if there were any idle coffin homes in the city. The watchman told him, "There's one over there. The guy who guarded it passed away last month. There's currently nobody there." Seeing that Xiao XingChen was blind and might have difficulties finding the way, he decided to lead them over.

This was precisely the coffin home where Xiao XingChen's corpse was put after he had died.

They thanked the watchman, and Xiao XingChen carried the injured person into the chamber on the right. The room wasn't large, but wasn't too small either. Including a low bed by the wall, the room had all of the necessities. He carefully laid the person onto the bed. Taking an elixir from his qiankun pouch, he pushed it through the person's clenched teeth. A-Qing felt around in the room for a while before she beamed, "There are so many things here! Here's a basin!"

Xiao XingChen, "Is there a stove?"

"There is!"

Xiao XingChen, "A-Qing, why don't you try to boil some water? Be careful and don't hurt yourself."

A-Qing pouted some more and got to work. Xiao XingChen touched the person's forehead, then took out another elixir and fed it to him. Wei WuXian really wanted to take a good look at the person's face, but A-Qing was clearly not interested in him. She was rather annoyed and refused to spare him a single glimpse. After the water had been boiled, Xiao XingChen slowly wiped off the blood on his face. Out of curiosity, A-Qing gave him a glance, and made a soundless .

Now that the person's face had been cleaned, she could see that his looks were actually quite decent.

As Wei WuXian saw the face, his heart immediately sunk.

Just as he had expected, it was Xue Yang.

He sighed in silence, < &
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At this point in time, with a childish charm, Xue Yang looked nothing more than a boy. However, who could've known that a boy like him whose canine teeth showed when he smiled was a maniac who wiped out entire clans.

Counting the years, this was probably after Jin GuangYao became the Chief Cultivator. In such a difficult situation, Xue Yang had probably just escaped Jin GuangYao's "elimination". Since he couldn't kill him, Jin GuangYao naturally didn't want to let anything out. Or, maybe because he believed that he wouldn't be able to live, he told the public that Xue Yang had already been

eliminated. However, villains always tended to outlast heroes. On the brink of dying, he was saved by his old rival XingChen. It was unfortunate that Xiao XingChen wasn't cautious to the point of feeling and examining his face. By accident, he had saved his enemy—the one who made his life this way. Although A-Qing could see, since she wasn't a cultivator, she didn't know of Xue Yang, much less the immense hatred between the two of them. She didn't even know what Xiao XingChen's name was…

Wei WuXian sighed again. Xiao XingChen couldn't be any more unlucky. It was as though all of the ominous energy in this world had tainted him.

Suddenly, Xue Yang frowned. Xiao XingChen was in the middle of inspecting and bandaging his wounds. Sensing that Xue Yang was about to wake up, he spoke, "Don't move."

Someone like Xue Yang who had done countless bad deeds in their life would naturally be more alert than ordinary people. Hearing this voice, his eyes sprang open and he sat up at once. Tumbling to the corner of the room, he glared at Xiao XingChen with a fierce expression and a careful posture. His eyes resembled those of a beast who had been trapped, not at all concealing the malice and cruelty within them. Watching the scene, A-Qing's scalp tingled. The sensation also passed onto Wei WuXian's head, who shouted silently, 3 $ &
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Xue Yang, "What…"

As soon as he spoke, Wei WuXian knew that there was no hope. Even after he spoke, Xiao XingChen wouldn't be able to discover who he was.

Xue Yang's throat was injured as well. After coughing up a large quantity of blood, his voice was so hoarse that nobody could tell they were the same person!

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Xiao XingChen assured, "I told you not to move. You're wounds are going to open. Don't worry. Since I saved you, of course I won't hurt you."

Xue Yang was quick at adjusting to sudden changes of situation. He immediately inferred that Xiao XingChen most likely didn't recognize him. With a roll of his eyes, he coughed, "Who are you?"

A-Qing interrupted, "If you have eyes can't you see for yourself? He's a roaming cultivator. He went to such lengths to carry you back and saved you and even gave you magical elixirs, yet you're so mean!"

Xue Yang turned to her at once. He spoke in a cold voice, “You’re blind?”

Wei WuXian was alarmed.

The little delinquent was both crafty and vigilant. Even though A-Qing had a pair of white eyes, he didn’t let down his guard. Not passing any points of suspicion, he immediately caught A-Qing’s slip of the tongue. Xue Yang had only spoken four words. With only these four words, it was impossible to determine if he was mean or not, unless A-Qing had seen his expression.

The good thing was that A-Qing grew up lying. She replied on the spot, “Do you discriminate against blind people? Well a blind person saved you. Or else, nobody would care even if you rotted on the side of the road! The first words you said weren’t even to thank Daozhang. How rude! And you called me blind in such a tone. Hmph… What’s wrong with being blind…”

She successfully switched the topic and the point of the conversation. As A-Qing muttered nonstop in an unyielding yet dejected manner, Xiao XingChen immediately went over to comfort her. In the corner, Xue Yang rolled his eyes. Xiao XingChen turned to him again, “Don’t sit by the wall. I didn’t bandage the wound on your leg yet. Come here.”

With an indifferent expression, Xue Yang continued to think. Xiao XingChen added, “If it’s not treated soon, your might end up crippled.”

Hearing this, Xue Yang decisively made his choice.

Wei WuXian could speculate what he was thinking. With a body covered in severe wounds, he couldn’t go anywhere if nobody helped treat him. Since Xiao XingChen was such an idiot that he placed himself right at his disposal, why not accept the help?

Thus, he changed his expression at once. In a voice filled with gratitude, he replied, “Then, thank you, Daozhang.”

Having seen Xue Yang’s skill of changing from merciless to affectionate within fractions of a second, Wei WuXian was truly worried for the two blind ones, both real and fake, in the room, but especially for A-Qing. She could see everything. If Xue Yang discovered this, to prevent the secret from leaking out, she’d definitely die. Although he knew that, in the end, A-Qing probably died in Xue Yang’s hands anyway, Wei WuXian still felt anxious since he’d be going through the same experience.

All of a sudden, he noticed that Xue Yang had been discreetly preventing Xiao XingChen from touching his left hand. Taking a closer look at it, he found that the little finger of Xue Yang’s left

hand was severed. From where it cut off, it could be seen that it wasn't a new wound. Back then, Xiao XingChen definitely knew that Xue Yang only had nine fingers. So this was why Xue Yang wore a black glove on his left hand when he was putting up his act.

Xiao XingChen was rather dedicated to helping him. After applying medicine to his wound, he bandaged it in a remarkably neat manner, "It's finished, but it's best if you don't move, or else your bones will dislocate again."

Xue Yang had already ascertained that Xiao XingChen was so gullible that he didn't recognize him. Although he was covered in blood and surrounded by other messes, the lazy grin appeared on his face again, "Daozhang, so you aren't going to ask who I am? Why I was injured so badly?"

If someone else were at his position, they would've carefully avoided the topic so that they didn't reveal details that would expose their identity. He, on the other hand, deliberately did the exact opposite. Turning to clean the medical kit and bandages, Xiao XingChen softly replied, "If you won't say it, then why should I ask? I just happened to have seen you and decided to lend a hand. It's nothing difficult for me, anyways. After your injuries heal, we'd go our separate ways. If I were you, there'd also be a lot of things that I don't want others to ask about."

Wei WuXian commented, < & "
8 It was natural for people to have complicated pasts. Xiao XingChen only avoided inquiring too much out of respect. Yet, it made it convenient for Xue Yang to use his respect. Wei WuXian was sure that he was not only going to get Xiao XingChen to heal all his wounds, after he recovered, he definitely wouldn't let them "go their separate ways" either.

Xue Yang rested in the bedroom of the coffin home's guard, while Xiao XingChen went to the main hall. Opening up a new coffin, he picked up some of the straws on the ground and thickly spread them over the bottom of the coffin. He turned to A-Qing, "The person inside is injured, so let's let him have the bed. Would you mind making do with this? I put straws on the bottom, so it shouldn't be too cold."

A-Qing had been roaming in the streets ever since she was young. Having lived alongside wind and hunger, there was nowhere she hadn't slept. She replied nonchalantly, "Not at all. It's good enough that I have somewhere to sleep. It won't be cold. Don't take off your coat for me again."

Xiao XingChen stroked the top of her head. With both his sword and horsetail whisk on his back, he walked outside again. To ensure safety, Xiao XingChen never let her follow when he was on

night-hunts. After crawling into the coffin and lying for a while, she heard Xue Yang call her from the other room, “Little Blind, come over.”

A-Qing poked her head out, “What?”

Xue Yang, “Do you want candy?”

The end of A-Qing’s tongue felt sour, as though she really wanted candy. Despite this, she still refused, “I’m not eating it. I’m not going.”

Xue Yang threatened sweetly, “Are you sure you’re not eating it? Are you too scared of coming? But, did you think that I actually can’t move? That if you don’t come, I’m not going to go over and find you?”

Hearing the strange tone of his words, A-Qing shuddered. She imagined the malicious grin suddenly appear on top of the coffin, and felt that it was even creepier. With some hesitation, she finally picked up her pole and slowly tapped her way to the room’s door. Before she could speak, a small object flew straight at her.

Wei WuXian instinctively wanted to dodge, worried that it was some sort of weapon. Of course, he couldn’t control this body. Immediately afterward, he finally realized, $

Xue Yang was testing A-Qing—if she was truly blind, she wouldn’t be able to avoid it!

As both a quick-witted person and someone who pretended to be blind throughout the year, A-Qing didn’t dodge at all. She didn’t even blink as she saw the object rush toward her. Instead, she let it hit her chest, then jumped back and fumed, “Hey! What did you throw at me?”

With A-Qing having passed the test, Xue Yang replied, “It’s candy, for you. I forgot that you’re blind and can’t catch. It landed by your feet.”

A-Qing humphed and squatted down. Searching around as if she really were blind, she found a piece of candy. She had never eaten something like this before. She gulped, wiped it, then put it into her mouth, happily crunching it with her teeth. Xue Yang lay on his side with one hand holding his chin, and asked, “Is it good, Little Blind?”

A-Qing, “I have a name. I’m not called Little Blind.”

Xue Yang, “You didn’t tell me your name, so I could only call you this.”

A-Qing had always told her name only to people who were nice to her, but she didn't like the way Xue Yang said it, so she told him, "Listen up. My name is A-Qing. Don't keep on calling me Little Blind and Little Blind!" After she said it, she felt that her voice was somewhat harsh. Afraid that she'd anger the person, she immediately started another topic, "You're such a strange person. You're covered in blood and this injured, but you have candy with you."

Xue Yang grinned, "When I was young, I really liked candy, but I couldn't get them no matter what and I could only watch people eat. So, I've always thought that if I become wealthier one day, I'd carry an infinite amount of candy with me."

A-Qing just so happened to have finished the candy that he gave her. Licking her lips, she wanted more. Her desire for candy outweighed her fear of the person in front of her, "Then do you have any more?"

Xue Yang laughed, "Of course I do. I'll give you more if you come over here."

A-Qing stood up and, with her bamboo pole, she walked toward him. Yet, when she was halfway there, Xue Yang started to look at her in an eerie way, his smile unchanged. Without making a sound, he pulled a sharp-edged sword out of his sleeve.

It was Jiangzai.

He pointed the tip of the sword toward A-Qing. If she walked just a few more steps forward, she'd be impaled by the sword. However, if A-Qing hesitated for the slightest moment, the fact that she wasn't actually blind would be revealed!

Sharing the same senses as A-Qing, Wei WuXian also felt the pins and needles pricking his scalp. Despite this, the young maiden bravely searched her way forward in a calm, ordinary manner. When the tip of the sword was half an inch away from her stomach, Xue Yang took it away and put it back into his sleeve. Exchanging it with two pieces of candy, he gave one to A-Qing and tossed the other one into his own mouth.

He asked, "A-Qing, where's that daozhang of yours gone to in the middle of the night?"

A-Qing licked and munched on the candy, "I think he went hunting."

Xue Yang tittered, "Hunting? More like night-hunting."

A-Qing, "Oh really? The two are pretty much the same. What's the difference? It's just helping other people fight ghosts and beasts without receiving any money."

Wei WuXian was truly amazed by how clever she was.

It wasn't that A-Qing couldn't remember what Xiao XingChen said to her. In fact, she remembered it better than anyone. She said "night-hunt" wrong on purpose. Since Xue Yang corrected her, in a way, he confirmed that he was also a cultivator. Xue Yang's test failed and was instead tested by her. The maiden was only so young, yet she already had such tactics.

Although Xue Yang looked scornful, his voice sounded confused, "He's blind already. How can he night-hunt?"

A-Qing raged, "You're at it again. What's wrong with being blind? Even if Daozhang's blind, he's still really cool. His sword's like whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. One word: fast." As she was prancing around, Xue Yang suddenly asked, "You can't see, so how do you know his sword is fast?"

The opponent was quick, but her defense was quicker. A-Qing replied in an outraged voice, "It's fast because I say so. Daozhang's sword must be fast! It's true that I can't see, but can't I listen? Just what are you trying to say? Do you discriminate against blind people like us?" She behaved exactly like a naive girl who was bragging about the person she admired. It sounded as natural as can be.

Now that she passed all three of his tests, Xue Yang's expression finally relaxed. It was likely that he finally believed that A-Qing was indeed blind.

However, A-Qing, on the other hand, grew extremely wary toward Xue Yang. The next day, Xiao XingChen found some wood, straw, and tiles for repairing the roof. As soon as he came inside, A-Qing secretly dragged him out again, whispering on about how this person was suspicious and that he definitely wasn't a good person, judging from him hiding secrets even though they were both cultivators. Unfortunately, she thought that the broken little finger was a trivial matter, so she didn't mention the most fatal characteristic. Xiao XingChen went about comforting her, "You've already eaten his candy, so you should stop chasing him away. Of course he'll go after his wounds have healed. Nobody would be willing to stay with us inside this coffin home."

This was indeed the truth. There was only a single bed inside such a shack. It was lucky for them that there was no wind or rain, or else the roof would've created a great problem. Nobody would want to live here. Just as A-Qing was about to continue her complaint of Xue Yang, the certain someone's voice came from behind them, "Are you talking about me?"

To A-Qing's surprise, he got off the bed again. However, she wasn't afraid of being found out at all, "We're talking about ? Don't flatter yourself!" Picking up her bamboo pole, she went inside, sneaked behind the window, and continued to eavesdrop.

Outside of the coffin home, Xiao XingChen turned to Xue Yang, "Your wounds haven't healed yet, and you're walking around already. Are you sure you'll fine?"

Xue Yang, "It'll heal faster if I walk around. And it's not that both of my legs are broken or anything. I'm used to injuries like these. I grew up beaten by others."

Xiao XingChen seemed as though he didn't know what to say in response, whether he should comfort him or take it as a joke. After a pause, he replied, "Oh…"

Xue Yang continued, "Daozhang, are the things that you brought here gonna be for repairing the roof?"

Xiao XingChen, "Yes. I'll most likely stay here for a temporary while. The broken roof won't be beneficial to A-Qing or to your injuries."

Xue Yang, "Should I help?"

Xiao XingChen thanked him, "I'll be fine."

Xue Yang, "Daozhang, do you know how to do it?"

Xiao XingChen laughed and shook his head, "I'm sorry, but I really haven't tried to do such a thing before."

And so, the two of them started to repair the roof together. One of them worked, the other one gave directions. Xue Yang was quite eloquent with words and was especially good at making witty remarks. His humor was accompanied by a presumptuous tone common to street markets. In the past, Xiao XingChen most likely had very rare contact with this type of people. Easily amused, he'd start laughing after just a few sentences. Hearing how cheerful their conversations were, A-Qing moved her lips in silence. After careful scrutiny, it seemed to have sounded like "let me kill you damn thing".

Wei WuXian felt the same as A-Qing.

Xue Yang's severe injuries that had almost taken his life were partly due to Xiao XingChen. The two had a relationship of absolute hatred. In his heart, he was probably hoping for Xiao

XingChen to die in the most gruesome way possible, yet he could still converse with him in such a lighthearted manner. If the one hiding behind the window right now was Wei WuXian himself, he would've killed Xue Yang regardless of the consequences to avoid later trouble. However, it wasn't his own body. And, even if A-Qing wanted to, she wasn't capable of killing him.

After about a month, under Xiao XingChen's meticulous care, Xue Yang's wounds had mostly healed. Aside from how he limped slightly when he walked, nothing else posed any inconvenience. Despite this, he still hadn't mentioned anything about leaving. He continued to live in this crammed coffin home with the two others. Wei WuXian had no idea what he was scheming of.

Today, after putting A-Qing to sleep, Xiao XingChen was about to leave and night-hunt again when Xue Yang's voice suddenly came, "Daozhang, why don't you take me with you tonight?"

His throat injury should've healed already as well. However, he purposely avoided using his original voice and disguised it in another tone. Xiao XingChen laughed, "Of course not. If you talk, I start laughing, and if I laugh, my sword won't be steady anymore."

Xue Yang replied in a piteous way, "Then I won't talk. I'll carry your sword and help you. Please don't give me the cold shoulder."

He had always been a master at behaving as though he was a spoiled child. When talking to people older than him, he sounded like a younger brother. And, since Xiao XingChen had probably cared for his shidi and shimei when he was a disciple of BaoShan SanRen, he naturally saw Xue Yang as junior to him. Xue Yang was a cultivator as well, so Xiao XingChen gladly agreed to the request. Wei WuXian thought, ! " "
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A-Qing was indeed clever. She also figured that Xue Yang probably didn't have good intentions. After the two left, she jumped out of the coffin and followed them from afar. The distance between them was a bit too far, since she was scared that she'd be discovered, and she ended up losing sight of them. Luckily, when Xiao XingChen was washing the vegetables earlier, he mentioned that a small village nearby was plagued by walking corpses and told the two of them to refrain from running around. A-Qing could still remember the place. Rushing over, she arrived soon afterward. She slipped into a dog hole on the bottom of the village's fence, hid behind one of the houses, and sneakily peeked out.

Wei WuXian wasn't sure if A-Qing understood what was happening, but he felt a sudden chill within his heart.

With his hands folded in front of him, Xue Yang stood on the side of the road, smiling with his head tilted. Xiao XingChen stood on the opposite side. Calmly unsheathing his sword, Shuanghua flashed its silver sword glare before it pierced through a villager's heart.

The villager was still alive.

Chapter 40　Grasses—Part Eight

If she were another girl of the same age, she would've started screaming immediately. However, since A-Qing had feigned being blind for so many years, a lot of people had put down their guard in front of her, believing that she couldn't see. She was used to seeing the more sickening sides of people, which had hardened her heart. She somehow managed to not make a sound.

Even so, Wei WuXian could feel the numbing stiffness that travelled upward from the bottom of her legs.

Standing amid numerous villagers' corpses that lay scattered on the ground, Xiao XingChen sheathed his sword and spoke in a solemn voice, "How can it be that there isn't a single living person inside this village? That all of them are walking corpses?"

Xue Yang smiled, but the voice that came out of his mouth sounded extremely confused, even somewhat pained, "Yeah. Good thing that your sword points at corpse energy on its own. Or else, with just the two of us, it would've been very difficult to break through."

Xiao XingChen, "Let's examine the village again. If there really isn't anyone left, then let's burn these corpses as soon as possible."

After they walked side-by-side into the distance, some strength finally returned to A-Qing's legs. She sneaked out from behind the house to where the piles of corpses were and glanced around on the ground. Wei WuXian's viewpoint oscillated as well.

All of these villagers were killed by sharp, clean pierces through the heart, done by Xiao XingChen's sword. Suddenly, Wei WuXian saw a few familiar faces.

A few pieces of memory ago, the three of them went outside one day and came upon a few men who had too much free time on their hands, playing dice at a the crossroad of a village. As the three passed the village, the men glanced up and saw a blind man, a blind girl, and a boy who limped, they all laughed and pointed. A-Qing spat at them and brandished her bamboo pole; Xiao XingChen walked passed calmly, as if he didn't hear anything; Xue Yang even smiled, although his eyes held no trace of any amusement.

A-Qing flipped over quite a few corpses. Opening their eyelids, she saw that all of them had white eyes. Livor mortis had already climbed over some of their faces. She let out a sigh of relief, but Wei WuXian's heart sunk even lower.

Although they looked a lot like walking corpses, these people were indeed living.

Except that they were under corpse poisoning.

Near the mouths and noses of a few corpses, Wei WuXian could also see leftover traces of a reddish-purple powder. Of course, the ones who'd been under poisoning for a long time were beyond hope since they had already become walking corpses. However, among them, there were still a few who hadn't been poisoned for long. They'd start to develop traits of corpses that had transformed, such as emitting corpse energy, but they would still be conscious and be able to speak, which meant that they would still be living. If they were helped, they could still be saved like Lan JingYi and the others. One should truly be careful not to accidentally kill them, since it'd be the same as killing a live human.

They should've been able to talk, to say who they were, to shout for help. However, the awful thing was that somebody had cut all of their tongues off before this. The corners of all of the corpse's lips seeped blood, either still warm or already dried.

Although Xiao XingChen couldn't see, Shuanghua could point out the directions of corpse energy. Because these villagers lost their tongues, they could only make strange howls that was extremely similar to those of walking corpses. Thus, he didn't doubt at all that the villagers he killed had already died.

It was a maniatic way to kill others without dirtying his own hand, a merciless way to instead dirty the hand that fed him.

A-Qing, however, didn't understand how this worked. She only knew of the rough process, having heard them sometimes being mentioned by Xiao XingChen. She murmured, "Is the bastard really helping Daozhang?"

Wei WuXian cautioned in silence, ! 1 $

Luckily, A-Qing's intuition was rather sharp. Although her knowledge didn't allow her to find anything suspicious, her vigilance toward Xue Yang was already deeply rooted in her intuition. She instinctively hated him and refused to settle. And so, whenever Xue Yang went out night-hunting with Xiao XingChen, she'd secretly follow them. Even when they were in the same house, she didn't lower her guard.

During one night, the winter winds howled outside. The three of them were crammed inside the smaller room, warming up by the old furnace. Xiao XingChen was mending a basket that had a broken strip of bamboo. A-Qing was draped in the only cotton quilt. Wrapping herself as though

she was a zongzi, she sat by his shoulder. Xue Yang held his chin with one hand and had nothing to do. Listening to A-Qing pester Xiao XingChen about telling her a story, he was rather annoyed, “Stop being so noisy. I’ll tie your tongue into a knot if you keep on yapping.”

A-Qing didn’t listen to him at all and demanded, “Daozhang, I wanna hear a story!”

Xiao XingChen, “When I was young, nobody told me stories. How would I know how to tell one?”

A-Qing continued the tantrum, and was about to start rolling on the ground when Xiao XingChen finally agreed, “Alright. I’ll tell you a story that happened on a mountain.”

A-Qing, “Once upon a time there was a mountain and on the mountain there was a ?”

Xiao XingChen, “No. Once upon a time, there was a celestial mountain that nobody knew of. On the mountain, there was an Immortal who reached . The Immortal accepted a lot of disciples, but she didn’t let them leave the mountain.”

After hearing the beginning, Wei WuXian understood at once, 2 / 2 2 :

A-Qing, “Why not?”

Xiao XingChen, “The Immortal only hid in the mountain because she couldn’t understand the world outside it. She told her disciples, ‘If you are going to leave the mountain, then there’s no need for you to come back. Don’t bring the disputes of the outside world into the mountain.’”

A-Qing, “Then how can you withstand the boredom? There’d definitely be disciples who want to go outside and play.”

Xiao XingChen, “You’re right. The first disciple who left was very outstanding. When he first left the mountain, due to his mastery over his skills, everyone praised and admired him, and he became a famous cultivator of the righteous path. But afterward, people don’t know what he went through, but his personality changed drastically, and he suddenly became a villain who killed people without blinking twice. In the end, he died under thousands of swords.”

This was the first disciple of BaoShan SanRen who “didn’t die a peaceful death”—YanLing DaoRen.

What this of Wei WuXian’s went through after leaving the mountain that caused his personality to change so much remained a mystery. It was likely that nobody would ever find

out. After Xiao XingChen finished mending the basket, he felt it a few times. He made sure that it wouldn't hurt the hand, put it down, and continued, "The second disciple was a girl and also very outstanding."

Wei WuXian's chest felt warm.

She was ZangSe SanRen.

A-Qing, "Is she pretty?"

Xiao XingChen, "I don't know. She was said to be really pretty."

A-Qing, "Then, I know! There must've been a lot of people who liked her and wanted to marry her after she left the mountain. And then, she must've married a high-ranking official or the leader of a big sect! Heehee."

Xiao XingChen laughed, "You guessed wrong. She married the servant of the leader of a big sect, and the two lived happily ever after."

A-Qing, "I don't like this. How would an outstanding and beautiful cultivator settle on a servant. This story's so cliche. It's probably made up by some poor . And then what happened? How was their life like after they lived happily ever after?"

Xiao XingChen, "And then the two of them accidentally lost their lives during a night-hunt."

A-Qing spat, "What sort of story is this?! She not only married a servant, but they died together! I'm not listening anymore!"

Wei WuXian thought to himself, - &
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Xiao XingChen sighed, "This was why I said in the beginning that I don't know how to tell stories."

A-Qing, "Then, Daozhang, you must remember the night-hunts you've been on, right? I like to hear those! Tell me, what sort of monsters have you fought?"

Xue Yang had been unfocused on the story, listening with his eyes shut. Now, though, his expression grew a bit more serious. His pupils shrunk, and he glanced at Xiao XingChen.

Xiao XingChen, “There really are too many.”

Xue Yang suddenly asked, “Really? Then, Daozhang, did you used to night-hunt alone as well?”

The corners of his lips curled up, indicating that he was up to no good, yet his voice was filled with simple curiosity. After a pause, Xiao XingChen smiled slightly, “No.”

This got A-Qing interested, “Then who else were with you?”

This time, Xiao XingChen’s pause was longer. After a few moments, he answered, “A very good friend of mine.”

An eerie light flashed inside Xue Yang’s eyes and his smile grew larger. It seemed that peeling off Xiao XingChen’s scabs gave him quite a lot of pleasure. A-Qing, on the other hand, was actually curious, “Daozhang, who’s this friend of yours? What sort of person are they?”

Xiao XingChen replied calmly, “A sincere man of noble nature.”

Hearing this, Xue Yang rolled his eyes in contempt. His lips moved faintly, as though he cursed at him. However, he purposely pretended that he was confused, “Then, Daozhang, where’s this friend of yours right now? Why hasn’t he come to find you when you’re already like this?

Wei WuXian,

This time, Xiao XingChen didn’t reply. Although A-Qing didn’t know what was going on, she looked as if she also sensed something. Holding her breath, she glared at Xue Yang. She clenched her teeth, as though she wanted to take a bite out of him. After a while of spacing out, Xiao XingChen broke the silence, “Where he is right now, I don’t know either. But, I hope that…”

Before he finished his sentence, he patted A-Qing’s head, “Alright. That’s it for tonight. I really don’t know how to tell stories. It’s quite embarrassing.”

A-Qing replied obediently, “Oh. Okay!”

Yet, Xue Yang suddenly spoke up, “Then how about I tell one?”

A-Qing was just about to feel disappointed. She immediately agreed, “Yes, yes. You tell one.”

Unhurried, Xue Yang began, “Once upon a time, there was a child.”

“The child really liked eating sweet things. But because he had no parents or money, he could rarely eat them. One day, the same as any other day, he was sitting zoned-out on a flight of stairs. Opposite to the stairs, there was a liquor shop. A man sat on a table inside of the shop. As he saw the child, he gestured for him to go over.”

Although this story’s beginning wasn’t that great either, it was definitely a lot better than Xiao XingChen’s cliche one. If A-Qing had a pair of rabbit ears, they must’ve perked up already.

Xue Yang continued, “Being naive and puzzled, the child had nothing to do anyways. He saw someone wave at him, and immediately ran over. The man pointed at a plate of pastries on the table and asked him, ‘Do you want this?’”

“Of course he wanted it. He nodded as fast as he could. So, the man gave the child a piece of paper and said, ‘If you want it, take this to a certain room in a certain place. I’ll give it to you after you take the paper.

“The child was really happy. He could have a plate of pastries if he ran the errand, and he earned the plate of pastries himself.

“He didn’t know how to read, so he just took the paper and went to the place. After he opened the door, a huge, brawny man came out. He took over the paper and looked at it, and he gave the child a slap so hard that his nose started bleeding. The man pulled the child’s hair and asked, ‘Who told you to take such a thing over?’”

The child must’ve been Xue Yang himself.

Wei WuXian could never have imagined that a crafty person like Xue Yang was so honest, so dim-witted when he was young, doing whatever a stranger asked him to do. The things written on the piece of paper definitely wasn’t nice. Most likely, the person at the liquor shop and the brawny man had some conflicts. The former didn’t dare curse at the latter in front of his face, so he told a child on the streets to bring over a humiliating letter instead. Such an act could even be described as perverse.

Xue Yang, “He felt scared and pointed the direction. The man went to the liquor shop, carrying the child by pulling his hair. The other man had long been gone. The leftover pastries on the table had been taken away by the waiters as well. The man was so angry that he threw over quite a few tables before storming out.”

“The child was really frustrated. He ran an errand for someone, got beaten up, and was held by his hair on the way back. His scalp was almost pulled off. Of course he wouldn’t settle without the pastries. So, he asked a waiter with tears in his eyes, ‘Where are my pastries? Where are the pastries that he said will be mine?”

Xue Yang continued as he grinned, “The store was in a mess and the waiter was feeling quite cross. He slapped the child a few times, so hard that his ears were even buzzing, and chased him out the door. He crawled up and walked for a while. Guess what? Coincidentally, he ran into the man that made him take the letter again.”

He stopped at this point. A-Qing was just getting engrossed in the story. She hurried him, “And then? What happened?”

Xue Yang, “What do you think happened? Just a few more slaps and a few more kicks.”

A-Qing, “This was you, right? He liked sweets—it definitely was you! Why were you like this when you were young? If I were you, I would’ve been like ptew, ptew, ptew and spat in his food, and then I’d hit him, and I’d hit him, and I’d hit him…” She danced around, almost hitting Xiao XingChen, who sat by her side.

Xiao XingChen quickly spoke, “Alright, alright. You finished listening to the story. It’s time to sleep.”

Even as A-Qing was carried by him to the coffin, she was still angrily complaining, “Ugh! Your stories make me so mad! One is so boring that it makes me mad, and the other is so annoying that it makes me mad! Jeez, that guy who made him take the letter was so annoying! I’m so frustrated!”

After Xiao XingChen tucked her, he walked a few steps, then asked, “What happened afterward?”

Xue Yang, “Guess. There was no afterward. You didn’t continue telling your story either, did you?”

Xiao XingChen, “No matter what happened afterward, since right now your life is fairly adequate, there’s no need for you to dwell too much on the past.”

Xue Yang, “I’m not dwelling on the past. It’s just that the Little Blind keeps on stealing my candy and even finished them, so now I can’t help but remember the days when I couldn’t have any.”

A-Qing kicked the coffin hard and protested, “Daozhang, don’t listen to him! I didn’t really eat that much!”

Xiao XingChen laughed softly, “Let’s all rest.”

That night, Xue Yang didn’t follow him. Xiao XingChen went out to night-hunt alone. A-Qing lay motionless inside the coffin, but she couldn’t fall asleep.

When the sky began to brighten, Xiao XingChen came back, not making a sound as he entered.

As he passed the coffin, he put his hand inside. A-Qing pretended as if she were asleep, and only opened her eyes again after Xiao XingChen left the coffin home. She saw a small piece of candy beside her straw pillow.

She stuck her head out and looked into the bedroom. Xue Yang wasn’t asleep either. He sat at the table, appearing as if he was thinking about something.

A piece of candy lay silently on the edge of the table.

After the night when they talked at the furnace, Xiao XingChen would give both of them a piece of candy everyday. Of course, A-Qing was quite pleased. Xue Yang expressed neither gratitude nor rejection toward this act, which made A-Qing angry at him for some time.

Xiao XingChen had always been responsible for the three’s meals. Since he was blind, he didn’t know how to select vegetables and was too embarrassed to bargain with others. When he went out alone, it was fine if the vendors were nice, but he sometimes met vendors who purposely took advantage of his blindness. The vegetables that he brought back would be lacking in either quality or quantity. Xiao XingChen didn’t care much himself, or one could say that he didn’t really pay attention to the matter, but A-Qing was often infuriated. In a seething manner, she’d demand to shop for ingredients alongside Xiao XingChen. Unfortunately, even though she could see, she couldn’t express anything. She didn’t dare throw tantrums and knock down the stalls in front of Xiao XingChen either. This was when Xue Yang became useful. With keen eyes and a sharp tongue that came with his delinquent self, if he went outside with them, whenever they wanted to buy something, the first thing he’d do was to shamelessly bargain the price down to a half. If the vendor agreed, he’d bargain even further; if the vendor didn’t, he’d put on a menacing look, and the vendors would start thinking that they were lucky somebody like him would decide to pay at all, hoping for him to leave as soon as possible. Presumably, when he was roaming freely in Kuizhou and Lanling, he probably didn’t have to pay anything for the things he wanted. Now that A-Qing had her anger vented out, out of happiness, she even praised him a few times.

And, thanks to the delightful candy everyday, since then, for a short length of time, a delicate peace was maintained between A-Qing and Xue Yang.

However, she could never let down her guard for Xue Yang. The short periods of peace were also often immediately suppressed by multiple doubts and suspicions.

One day, A-Qing was playing on the streets again, pretending to be blind. She had been playing the game for her whole life, and hadn't grown tired of it even once. As she was knocking her bamboo pole while walking around, suddenly, a voice came from behind her, "Young Maiden, if your eyes can't see, it's best if you don't run so fast."

It was the voice of a young man, which sounded rather cold. A-Qing turned around to see a tall cultivator who wore black robes, standing a few meters away from her. A sword was carried behind his back while a horsetail whisk was in his arm. With an upright posture and drifting sleeves, he had a proud, aloof air to him.

This man just happened to be Song Lan.

A-Qing tilted her head. Song Lan had already walked over. Putting his whisk over A-Qing's shoulder, he led her to the side, "There are less people on the side of the road."

Wei WuXian commented, 3 - "

A-Qing tittered, "A-Qing is very thankful of Daozhang!"

Song Lan took his whisk back and held it in his arms again. He glanced at her, "Don't play around too much. The dark energy here is quite strong. In the future, be careful not to linger outside."

A-Qing, "Okay!"

Song Lan nodded and continued walking, but A-Qing couldn't help but turn around to watch him. After he walked for a while, he stopped a passerby, "Excuse me. Has anyone seen a blind cultivator who carries a sword in the area?"

At once, A-Qing started to listen carefully. The passerby replied, "I'm not too sure. Daozhang, you can try asking the people over there."

Song Lan, "Thank you."

A-Qing tapped her way over, “Daozhang, why are you searching for the other daozhang?”

Song Lan immediately turned around, “Have you seen him?”

A-Qing, “Maybe I have, but maybe I haven’t.”

Song Lan, “How can I make it so that you’ve seen him?”

A-Qing, “If you answer a few questions for me, then maybe I’ll remember that I have. Are you a friend of the daozhang?”

Song Lan hesitated. He only replied after a few moments, “... Yes.”

Wei WuXian wondered,

A-Qing also felt that his answer was somewhat reluctant. Her suspicion grew again, “Do you really know him? How tall is he? Is he pretty or ugly? What is his sword like?”

Song Lan answered straight away, “His height is similar to mine. His appearance is rather fine. His sword is carved with patterns of frost.”

Seeing that he answered everything correctly and didn’t look like a bad guy, A-Qing responded, “I know where he is. Daozhang, follow me!”

Song Lan had already been travelling in search for his close friend for a few years, and had been disappointed countless times. Now that he finally heard news of him, he couldn’t even believe his ears. He managed with effort, “... Thank… Thank you…”

A-Qing led him until they were near the coffin home, yet Song Lan stopped in his tracks. A-Qing asked, “What’s wrong? Aren’t you gonna go over?”

For some reason, Song Lan’s face was extremely pale. He stared at the door of the coffin home, as if he would rush inside if he could, but was too scared to do so. The aloof look that he had was completely gone. Wei WuXian guessed,

Just as he made up his mind and was about to go in, a lackadaisical figure strolled inside before he could.

As he saw who the figure was, Song Lan's face instantly went from pale to ashen!

A series of laughter came from the coffin home. A-Qing snorted, "The annoying one is back."

Song Lan, "Who is he? Why is he here?"

A-Qing whined, "He's a bastard. He never told us his name, so who knows who he is? He was saved by Daozhang. Now he sticks to Daozhang all the time. He's such a pain!"

Song Lan's face switched between being surprised and exasperated. After a moment, he spoke, "Be quiet!"

A-Qing was scared by his expression and obeyed. The two of them silently approached the coffin home, one standing beside the window and the other hiding beneath it. In the coffin home, Xiao XingChen asked, "Whose turn is it today?"

The instant he heard the voice, Song Lan's hands trembled so much that A-Qing could clearly see it.

Xue Yang, "What if, from now on, we don't take turns anymore? Let's change it up."

Xiao XingChen, "You only spoke up because it's your turn today, didn't you? How do you want to change it?"

Xue Yang, "Here. There are two sticks. If you pick the longer one, you don't have to go; if you pick the shorter one, then you'll have to go. What do you think?"

After a moment of silence, Xue Yang laughed, "Yours is short. I win. You're going!"

Xiao XingChen said with reluctance, "Alright. I'll go."

He sounded as though he finally stood up and started walking toward the door. Wei WuXian cheered, - & 2 %

However, before he walked very far, Xue Yang spoke up, "Come back. I'll go."

Xiao XingChen, "Why are you willing to go, now?"

Xue Yang stood up as well, “Are you an idiot? I tricked you. I picked the shorter one. It’s just that I’ve been hiding the longest stick behind me, so whichever one you pick, I can take out a longer one. I’m just exploiting the fact that you can’t see.”

He laughed at Xiao XingChen some more and sauntered out, holding a basket in his hand. A-Qing looked up at Song Lan, whose entire body was shaking. She didn’t understand why he was so angry. Song Lan gestured for her to be quiet. Only after the two walked some distance away did Song Lan start asking A-Qing about the details, “This man, when did Xing… when did the daozhang save him?”

His tone was solemn. A-Qing understood that the situation was no joke, and she answered him seriously as well, “It’s been a long time, a couple of years.”

Song Lan, “The daozhang never found out who he is?”

A-Qing, “No.”

Song Lan, “What has he done during his stay with the daozhang?”

A-Qing, “Joke around, bully me, scare me, and… Oh, he also night-hunts with Daozhang!”

Song Lan frowned, thinking that Xue Yang probably wouldn’t be so nice, “Night-hunt? Night-hunt what things? Do you know?”

A-Qing didn’t dare to be careless. After some thought, she replied, “They used to often night-hunt walking corpses, sometime in the past. Now it’s usually ghosts, animals that behave weirdly, and so on.”

As he inquired into the matter, Song Lan also felt that something was strange, but he couldn’t find any clues. He continued, “Is the daozhang close with him?”

Although she didn’t want to admit it, A-Qing still confessed, “I think that Daozhang is really unhappy when he’s alone… He’s finally got someone who cultivates as well… So, I think he sorta likes listening to the bastard tell jokes.”

Song Lan’s face was clouded with both rage and devastation. Amid the confusion, only one thing was for certain:

He definitely couldn’t tell Xiao XingChen about this!

He cautioned, “Don’t tell the daozhang anything unnecessary.”

As soon as he finished, he went toward the direction that Xue Yang left in. A-Qing asked, “Daozhang, are you going to beat up that bastard?”

Song Lan was already far away from her. Wei WuXian thought,
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Xue Yang went outside holding the vegetable basket. A-Qing knew which path he’d use if he was going to buy vegetables. Taking a shortcut, she sprinted through a part of a forest, her heart beating faster than ever. After chasing for a while, she finally saw Xue Yang’s figure forward of her. He held a basket in one hand, which was filled with cabbages, carrots, steamed buns, and other food. He walked as he yawned lazily. He had probably finished shopping.

A-Qing had always been good at hiding and eavesdropping. She snuck into a bush beside the forest, moving along with him. Suddenly, Song Lan’s cold voice came from in front of her, “Xue Yang.”

As if someone had poured a bucket of freezing water over his face, or if someone had slapped him awake from a deep sleep, Xue Yang’s expression became scary at once.

Song Lan came out from behind a tree. His sword had already been unsheathed. He held it in his hand, with the tip pointing to the ground.

Xue Yang pretended to be surprised, “Oh, isn’t this Daozhang Song? What a rare guest. You here to get a free meal?”

Song Lan lunged with his sword. Xue Yang immediately shook Jiangzai out of his sleeves, blocked the attack, and backed a few steps. He put the basket under a tree, “You damn cultivator. For once I actually wanted to shop for food, and here you fucking are, spoiling my mood!”

In a fury, Song Lan’s attacks were aiming for fatality. He shouted in a low voice, “Just what in the world are you scheming?! Why have you spent so long near Xiao XingChen?!”

Xue Yang laughed, “And I was wondering why Daozhang Song still had business with me. So you want to ask me about this.”

Song Lan raged, “Tell me! Why would a scum like you be so nice as to help him night-hunt?!”

The wind of the sword brushed against his face. A cut appeared on Xue Yang's cheek, but he wasn't surprised at all, "How does Daozhang Song understand me so much?"

One of the two fought with skills learned from a proper sect, while the other fought with experience from committing crimes. It was obvious that Song Lan was more skilled than Xue Yang. His pierced through Xue Yang's arm, "Tell me!"

If not for how the matter was so alarming that Song Lan must know what was going on, the sword might have pierced through the neck instead of the arm. Although Xue Yang was injured, his expression didn't change at all, "You really wanna hear it? I'm afraid that you might go mad. Some things shouldn't be made known."

Song Lan's voice was colder than ever, "Xue Yang, my patience is running out!"

With a , Xue Yang blocked an attack that was aimed at his eyes. He replied, "Fine, if you're so keen on hearing it. Do you know what that bestest friend of yours did? He killed a lot of walking corpses. He exercised for the greater good, without asking for anything in return. It's quite touching, really. Although he dug his eyes out for you and became blind, the good thing was that Shuanghua can point out corpse energy for him. What's even better? I discovered that if you cut off the tongues of people under corpse poisoning and made it so that they couldn't speak, Shuanghua couldn't tell apart living and dead corpses either, so…"

He explained it in an extremely detailed way. Both SongLan's arm and sword were trembling, "You monster… You vile monster…"

Xue Yang, "Daozhang Song, sometimes I feel like that polite people like you are really at a disadvantage when they're cursing others, because it's always those few words being repeated over and over again. There's absolutely no power or creativity at all. I haven't used these two words to call others ever since I was seven."

Song Lan was in a towering rage. He attacked again, this time aiming at his throat, "You imposed upon his blindness and fooled him so terribly!"

The attack was both fast and fatal. Xue Yang managed to dodge it, but it pierced his shoulder nonetheless. As if he couldn't feel anything, he didn't even flinch, "His blindness? Daozhang Song, have you forgotten who he dug out his own eyes and became blind for?"

Hearing this, both Song Lan's face and movements stiffened.

Xue Yang continued, “What position are you in to blame me? A friend of his? Are you shameless enough to say that you’re his friend? Hahahaha, Daozhang Song, do I need to remind you of what you said to Xiao XingChen after I wiped out the Baixue Temple? When he worried about you and wanted to help you, what sort of expression did you face him with? What sort of things did you say?”

Song Lan was in a terrible state of mind, “I! At the time, I…”

Xue Yang cut him short, “At the time, you were upset? You were pained? You were grieving? You didn’t know where to vent your anger? And that was why you took it out on him? To be fair, the reason why I wiped out your temple was precisely because of him. It’s quite understandable why you took it out on him. In fact, it was exactly what I wanted.”

Every sentence was a critical strike!

Both Xue Yang’s speech and attacks quickened. His movements becoming calmer and more difficult to defend, he gradually gained the upper hand, yet Song Lan didn’t notice this at all. Xue Yang added, “Well! Who was the one who said ‘from now on, we won’t need to meet again’”? Wasn’t it you, Daozhang Song? He listened to your request and disappeared after he dug out his eyes for you, but why have you come to him now? Isn’t this making it a bit too difficult? Daozhang Xiao XingChen, don’t you agree?”

Hearing this, Song Lan wavered. His attacks hesitated as well!

Being fooled by such a simple trick, it could be seen that Song Lan’s mind and movements were really disrupted by Xue Yang. Taking advantage of such a perfect chance, with a wave of his hand, corpse-poisoning powder rained from above.

Nobody had seen this sort of carefully refined corpse-poisoning powder before, including Song Lan. He accidentally breathed in quite a large amount. Immediately knowing that he was in a bad situation, Song Lan started to cough. However, Xue Yang’s Jiangzai had long been waiting. With a cold flash of the sword’s tip, it shot straight into his mouth!

Instantly, Wei WuXian’s field of vision turned into complete darkness. A-Qing was so scared that she closed her eyes.

But, he knew already. This was when Song Lan’s tongue had been cut off by Jiangzai.

The sounds were terrifying.

A-Qing's eyes felt warm, but she clenched her teeth tightly, not making a single sound. Her eyes blinked open again. Song Lan managed to keep standing, leaning on his sword. With his other hand, he covered his mouth. Blood seeped incessantly from between his fingers.

With his tongue cut off by Xue Yang's sudden attack, Song Lan was under so much agony that he couldn't even walk. Yet, he still pulled his sword from the ground and staggered toward Xue Yang. Xue Yang dodged the attack easily. A bizarre smile was on his face.

The next moment, Wei WuXian saw why he smiled in such a way.

Shuanghua's silver glare pierced into Song Lan's chest, then came out from his back.

Song Lan looked down at Shuanghua's blade, which penetrated his heart, then slowly looked up again. He saw Xiao XingChen, who calmly held the sword.

Xiao XingChen wasn't at all aware of the situation, "Are you there?"

Song Lan moved his lips soundlessly.

Xue Yang grinned, "I am. Why are you here?"

Xiao XingChen pulled out Shuanghua and returned it to its sheath, "Shuanghua behaved strangely. I followed its guidance and came to see." He wondered, "We haven't seen any walking corpses in this area for quite a while, not to mention one that roamed alone. Did it come here from somewhere else?"

Slowly, Song Lan fell to his knees before Xiao XingChen.

Xue Yang glanced down at him, "Probably. It's making awful noises."

At such a time, if Song Lan passed his sword to Xiao XingChen's hands, Xiao XingChen would've immediately known who he was. He'd be able to recognize the sword of his closest friend with just a touch.

Yet, Song Lan could no longer do so. Would he pass the sword to Xiao XingChen, tell him who he had just killed with his own hands?

This was precisely what Xue Yang was aiming for, thus he had nothing to fear. He turned to Xiao XingChen, "Let's go. It's time to cook dinner. I'm hungry already."

Xiao XingChen, “Have you bought the vegetables?”

Xue Yang, “Yep. I ran into this thing on my way back. What a bad day.”

Xiao XingChen left first. Xue Yang patted the wounds on his shoulder and arm. He picked up the basket again and, as he passed Song Lan, he smiled and looked down, “No food for you.”

After Xue Yang was long gone and had probably reached the coffin home with Xiao XingChen already, A-Qing finally stood up from behind the bush.

Her legs had both numbed after squatting for so long. Holding her pole, she limped and wobbled to Song Lan, whose kneeling corpse had already stiffened.

Song Lan’s death was far from being peaceful. A-Qing jumped from his widely opened eyes. Then, as she saw the blood that spilled out of his mouth, streaming down his chin, staining the front of his shirt, pooling over the ground, large drops of tears rolled from her eyes.

Although she was scared, A-Qing reached out to close Song Lan’s eyes. She then kneeled in front of him and put her palms together, “Daozhang, please don’t blame me or the other daozhang. If I came out, I’d die anyways, so I had to hide and couldn’t help you. The other daozhang was fooled by that bastard as well. He didn’t do it on purpose. He didn’t know that you were the one he killed!”

She sobbed on, “I’m going back. Please, let your deceased spirit bless me so that I can get Daozhang Xiao XingChen out of there, bless us so that we can escape the demon’s control. I must not let that monster Xue Yang die in peace. I must cut him into pieces so that he never enters reincarnation again!”

After her speech, she kowtowed on the ground three loud times. She wiped her face harshly, stood up, encouraged herself, and walked in the direction of Yi City.

The sky had already darkened when she returned to the coffin home. Xue Yang was peeling apples at the table. Cutting all of the slices into rabbits, he seemed to be a wonderful mood. Anyone who saw him would think that this must be a lively youth. Nobody would be able to imagine what he had just done. Hearing her entrance, Xiao XingChen came out with a plate of cabbage in his hand, “A-Qing, where did you go today? It’s already so late.”

Glancing at her, something suddenly flashed in Xue Yang’s eyes, “What’s wrong? Her eyes are so swollen.”

Xiao XingChen hurried over, “What happened? Did someone bully you?”

Xue Yang, “Bully her? Who’d be able to bully her?”

Although he wore a broad smile, he was clearly growing suspicious. Suddenly, A-Qing threw the bamboo pole onto the ground, and started wailing.

She cried with both tears and a runny nose. Almost hiccuping, she flew into Xiao XingChen’s arms, “Am I ugly? Am I ugly? Daozhang, you have to tell me. Am I really that ugly?”

Xiao XingChen stroked her head, “Of course not. A-Qing is such a pretty girl. Who said that you’re ugly?”

Xue Yang commented with disdain, “You’re so ugly. You’re even uglier when you cry.”

Xiao XingChen chided, “Don’t say that.”

A-Qing cried harder. She stomped her feet, “Well, Daozhang, it’s not like you can see! What’s the use if you say I’m pretty? You’re definitely lying to me! He can see. He said I’m ugly, so I must really be that ugly! Both ugly and blind!”

From all the fuss, both of them naturally believed that some children called her “ugly-pants” or “white-eyed blind girl” when she was outside today, and was feeling frustrated. Xue Yang dismissed, “You came back crying just because they said you’re ugly? Where did your usual unreasonable rudeness go?”

A-Qing, “I’m not rude! Daozhang, do you have any money left?”

With a pause, Xiao XingChen replied in embarrassment, “Uh… I think so.”

Xue Yang interrupted, “I can lend you some.”

A-Qing spat, “You’ve been living and eating with us for so long, and you still call it ‘lending’ if we use some of your money! What a miser! You have no shame! Daozhang, I wanna buy pretty clothes and pretty jewelry. Can you come with me?”

Wei WuXian thought to himself, 2 " & /
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Xiao XingChen, “Of course I can, but I won’t be able to help you see if they suit you or not.”

Xue Yang interrupted again, “I can help her.”

A-Qing jumped so high that she almost hit Xiao XingChen’s chin, “I don’t care, I don’t care! I only want you! I don’t want him beside me at all. All he’ll say is that I’m ugly! And he’ll call me Little Blind!”

It wasn’t the first time that she acted in such an unreasonable way. The two of them were already used to it. Xue Yang pulled a face at her, while Xiao XingChen agreed, “Alright. How about tomorrow?”

A-Qing, “Tonight!”

Xue Yang, “If you go tonight, all of the markets will have closed. Where else could you possibly go?”

Having no other choice, A-Qing gave in, “Fine! Then tomorrow it is! It’s a promise!”
Having failed a first attempt, if she still begged to go outside, Xue Yang would definitely be suspicious again. A-Qing could only drop the matter for now and go to the table for dinner. During the previous ruckus, although her performance was the same as before, appearing more than natural, her stomach had been stretched taut throughout. She had been so nervous that, even now, the hand that she held her bowl with was still trembling. Xue Yang was sitting right at her left. As he glanced sideways at her, her legs stiffened again. Since she was too frightened to eat anything, she conveniently pretended that she was too furious to have an appetite. She spat the food out every time she had a bite. Stabbing her bowl, she muttered and cursed, “You damned bitch. You filthy maid. Well I don’t think you’re any better, slut!”

Listening to her curse at the nonexistent “filthy maid”, Xue Yang couldn’t hold himself from rolling his eyes, while Xiao XingChen spoke, “Don’t waste food.”

Xue Yang’s eyes left A-Qing and turned to Xiao XingChen’s face instead. Wei WuXian thought,

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However, Xiao XingChen was not at all aware of the two pairs of eyes that pointed at him. After all, he was the only one in the room who was truly blind.

After they finished, Xiao XingChen cleaned up the bowls and chopsticks, and went in the central chamber again. Unable to sit or stand still, A-Qing wanted to follow him inside, but Xue Yang suddenly called her, “A-Qing.”

A-Qing’s heart immediately skipped a beat. Even Wei WuXian felt the chills that ran from her head down her back.

She responded, “Why did you suddenly call my name?!”

Xue Yang, “Didn’t you say yourself that you didn’t wanna be called Little Blind?”

A-Qing humphed, “People don’t just suddenly act nice to others, unless they’re hiding other intentions! Just what do you want?”

Xue Yang smiled, “Nothing, really. I just want to teach you what you should do the next time others curse at you.”

A-Qing, “Huh. Tell me, then. What should I do?”

Xue Yang, “If someone calls you ugly, then make her even uglier. Cut a few dozens of times on her face so that she’ll never have the guts to go outside again. If someone calls you blind, then carve one end of your pole sharp, and stab once in both of her eyes so that she’ll also be blind. Then, see if she dares to bad mouth you again.”

A-Qing’s blood ran cold. She pretended as if she thought he was frightening her, “You’re scaring me again!”

Xue Yang snorted, “Well, think what you want.”

As he finished, he pushed the plate that held the rabbit-shaped apple slices in front of her, “Eat up.”

Looking at the plate of cute, delicate slices, disgust filled both A-Qing’s and Wei WuXian’s hearts.

The next day, just as they got up, A-Qing pleaded Xiao XingChen to shop for pretty clothes and makeup alongside her. Xue Yang was annoyed, “If you two are gone, then I’d have to buy today’s food again?”

A-Qing, “Why can’t you buy it? Think about how many times Daozhang bought them! You’re the only one who bullies and plays tricks on Daozhang all the time!”

Xue Yang, “Okay, okay. I’ll go buy it. I’ll go right now.”

After he was gone, Xiao XingChen asked, “A-Qing, are you still not ready yet? Can we go now?”

A-Qing only came inside after she made sure that Xue Yang was long gone. She closed the door and asked in a trembling voice, “Daozhang, do you happen to know someone called Xue Yang?”

Translator’s Notes

% : The storyline of “Once upon a time there was a mountain and on the mountain there was a temple” is from a classic Chinese children’s rhyme that repeats itself over and over again, often used by adults to get children to sleep.

$: This means that she has already gained immortality, what every cultivator is aiming to do.

: This is similar to a shishu. Whereas shishu refers to one’s parent’s shidi, shibo refers to one’s parent’s shixiong.

: In Ancient China, there was a time when scholars were heavily frowned upon, especially associated with poorness.

Chapter 41 Grasses—Part Nine

Xiao XingChen’s smile froze.

The words “Xue Yang” were too big of a shock to him. His complexion was quite pale to start with. After he heard the name, all of the blood drained from his face. His lips were almost a shade of pink-tinted white.

As if he wasn’t sure, Xiao XingChen asked in a low voice, “... Xue Yang?” He was suddenly startled, “A-Qing, how did you learn of this name?”

A-Qing, “Xue Yang is the person with us! He’s that bastard!”

Xiao XingChen stammered in confusion, “The person with us? … The person with us…” He shook his head, as though he was feeling somewhat dizzy, “How did you know?”

A-Qing, “I heard him kill someone!”

Xiao XingChen, “He killed someone? Who did he kill?”

A-Qing, “A woman! She’s very young. I think she had a sword with her. Xue Yang was hiding a sword on him as well. It was because I heard them fighting. They were really loud. The woman kept on calling him ‘Xue Yang’, and said that he ‘wiped out the temple’, that he ‘killed countless people’, and that he should be ‘rightfully punished’. Oh heaven, he’s out of his mind! He’s been hiding beside us all along, and I don’t even know what he’s trying to do!”

A-Qing stayed awake the whole night, making up lies in her mind. First, she definitely couldn’t let Daozhang know that he killed living humans thinking that they were walking corpses. She couldn’t let him know that he killed Song Lan with his own hands either. So, although it’d be unfair to Daozhang, she couldn’t tell him about Daozhang Song’s death no matter what. The best would be for Xiao XingChen to run away as far as he could after he discovered who Xue Yang was!

Yet, the news was too hard for him to accept. And, it also sounded rather absurd. Xiao XingChen couldn’t believe it at all, “But his voice is different. And…”

A-Qing was so frustrated that she kept on knocking her pole on the ground, “He purposely made it so that his voice is different! He’s afraid that you’ll recognize him!” Suddenly, an idea popped up, “Oh right! Right, right! He has nine fingers. Daozhang, do you know? Did Xue Yang also have nine fingers? You’ve definitely seen him before, right?”

Xiao XingChen staggered, almost falling to the ground.

A-Qing immediately helped him to the table, where they both sat down slowly. After a while, Xiao XingChen spoke again, “But, A-Qing, how did you find out that he has nine fingers? Have you touched his hand before? If he really is Xue Yang, though, how would he have let you touch his left hand for you to discover it?”

A-Qing clenched her teeth, “... Daozhang! Let me tell you the truth! I’m not blind. I can see! I didn’t touch his hands, but saw them instead!”

Each shock was greater than the previous. Xiao XingChen was almost at a loss for words, “What did you say? You can see?”

Although A-Qing was afraid, she couldn’t hide the truth any longer. She apologized and apologized, “I’m sorry, Daozhang! I didn’t lie to you on purpose! I was scared that if you knew that I’m not blind, you’d chase me away! But please don’t blame me for now. Let’s run away together. He’ll be back after he finishes shopping for food!”

Suddenly, she closed her mouth.

The bandages that wrapped around Xiao XingChen’s eyes were initially white. Now, though, two smudges of red seeped from within. The blood grew more and more and eventually leaked through the bandages, trickling down from where his eyes once were.

A-Qing cried out, “Daozhang, you’re bleeding!”

Xiao XingChen seemed as if he had just noticed. With a faint exclamation, he reached his hand to his face. When he took it away, it was covered in blood. With quivering hands, A-Qing helped him wipe some off. Yet, the harder she tried, the more blood there was. Xiao XingChen raised a hand, “I’m fine… I’m fine.”

Originally, the injury of his eyes would bleed whenever he had excessive thoughts or emotions, but it hadn’t recurred in quite a long while. Wei WuXian even thought that it had healed already. Today, though, it started to bleed again.

Xiao XingChen murmured, “But… But if he really is Xue Yang, why would it be like this? Why didn’t he kill me in the beginning, and even stayed by my side for so many years? Why would this be Xue Yang?”

A-Qing, “Of course he wanted to kill you in the beginning! I’ve seen his eyes before. They were meaner than mean and scarier than scary! But since he was injured and couldn’t move, he needed someone to care for him! I didn’t know him. If I did and knew that he was a killing machine, I would’ve stabbed him to death when he was in the bush! Daozhang, let’s run! Alright?”

Yet, in his heart, Wei WuXian sighed, 3 &
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As he had expected, after Xiao XingChen managed to calm down, he told A-Qing, “A-Qing, run away.”

His voice was slightly hoarse. A-Qing sounded somewhat scared, “Me? Daozhang, let’s run away together!”

Xiao XingChen shook his head, “I can’t go. I need to find out what exactly he’s trying to do. He definitely has a goal, and tried to reach this goal in the past few years by pretending to somebody else and staying by my side. If I left him here alone, I’m afraid that the people of Yi City would sink into his hands. Xue Yang has always been this way.”

This time, A-Qing’s sobs weren’t faked anymore. She tossed the bamboo pole to the side and clung to Xiao XingChen’s leg, “Me? Daozhang, how can I go by myself? I wanna stay with you. If you’re not leaving, then I’m not leaving either. If worst comes to worst we’ll just be murdered by him. I’ll be so lonely that I die if I’m roaming outside by myself anyways. I know you don’t want this to happen so me, so let’s run away together!”

Unfortunately, after the secret that she wasn’t blind was revealed, her tactic of using this to gain sympathy no longer worked. Xiao XingChen replied, “A-Qing, you can see and you’re very clever. I trust that you’ll be able to live a good life. You don’t know how scary Xue Yang is. You can’t stay. You mustn’t go near him again, either.”

Wei WuXian could even hear A-Qing silent screaming, "$ " " $

But she couldn’t open her mouth and speak the truth.

Suddenly, a series of brisk footsteps came from outside.

Xue Yang was back!

Xiao XingChen looked up in alarm, returning to the level of keenness he had when he night-hunted. He quickly pulled A-Qing over and whispered, “When he comes in, I’ll handle him while you use the chance to escape. Listen to me!”

A-Qing was so scared that she could only nod, tears still brimming in her eyes. Xue Yang kicked the door, “What are you guys doing? I’m already back, and you haven’t left yet? If you’re still in there then open the hatch and let me inside. I’m so tired.”

Simply from the tone and the voice, one would think that he was only a boy-next-door, a cheerful shidi. However, who'd ever imagine that the person who stood outside was a villain who had no sense of morality, a demon who wore the facade of a human!

Although the door wasn't locked, it had been bolted from the inside. If they didn't open the door anytime soon, Xue Yang would definitely be suspicious. Then, when he entered, he'd definitely be somewhat vigilant. A-Qing wiped her face, "How are you tired?! It's only such a small distance from here to the market, and you're already tired?! I'm just a bit slow since I'm seeing which outfit is better. How does it concern you?!"

Xue Yang mocked, "How many outfits do you even have? No matter how much you change, you'll look the same. Come, come, open the door."

Even when A-Qing's legs wobbled, she still spat in a strong voice, "Hmph! I'm not gonna open it for you. Kick however you please."

Xue Yang laughed, "Mark your words. Daozhang, fix the door afterwards. Don't blame it on me."

After he spoke, he immediately kicked the wooden door open. He stepped over the high threshold and walked inside. He held the basket filled with vegetables on one hand, and a crimson apple on the other. Just as he took a bite out of it, he looked down only to see Shuanghua, which sunk into his stomach.

The basket dropped to the ground. The cabbage, carrots, apples, and steam buns rolled onto the floor.

Xiao XingChen shouted in a low voice, "A-Qing, run!"

Moving as fast as she could, A-Qing barged through the door of the coffin home. Immediately afterward, she went on another path and crept back again. She climbed to her usual hiding spot, the one she used most often and was most familiar with, and even popped her head out to watch what was going on inside.

Xiao XingChen asked coldly, "Was it fun?"

Xue Yang took another bite into the apple that was still in his hand. He only replied after calmly chewing for a while and swallowing the fruit, "Yes. Of course it was fun."

He used his original voice again.

Xiao XingChen, “Just what do you want to do, having stayed with me for all these years?”

Xue Yang, “Who knows? Maybe I’m bored.”

Xiao XingChen pulled out Shuanghua and got ready to attack again. Xue Yang added, “Daozhang Xiao XingChen, do you still want to hear the second half of the story that I didn’t finish?”

Xiao XingChen, “No.”

Although he refused, his head tilted slightly forward and his sword paused as well. Xue Yang replied, “Well, I’m gonna tell it anyways. After you hear it, if you still think it’s my fault, you can do whatever you want.”

He casually wiped the wound on his stomach, suppressing it so that it didn’t bleed excessively, “The child saw the man who fooled him to take the letter. He felt both frustrated and happy. He threw himself to the man as he cried, and said to him, ‘I brought the letter there, but the pastries are gone and I was beaten up. Can you give me another plate?

“The man seemed like he had been caught by the brawnier one and had been beaten as well. His face was injured. Seeing the dirty little child clinging onto his leg, he couldn’t help but felt annoyed and kicked him away at once.

“He climbed up the ox cart and told the cart driver to leave at once. The child climbed up from the ground and kept on chasing the cart. He really wanted to eat the plate of sugary pastries. Having finally chased up to it, he waved his arms in front of the cart for them to stop. The man was too irritated by his crying. Snatching the driver’s whip, he lashed at his head and threw him onto the ground.”

He spoke one word at a time, “And then, the wheels of the cart ground over the child’s hand, one finger at a time.”

Xiao XingChen couldn’t see, but Xue Yang raised his left hand at him anyway, “He was seven! The bones of his left hand were crushed, while one finger was ground into battered flesh on the spot! This man was Chang Ping’s father.

“Daozhang Xiao XingChen, you were so just, so stern when you brought me to 9 % ! You condemned me and asked me why I wiped out an entire sect simply because of some suspicion. Is it that, since the fingers weren’t yours, you guys were incapable of feeling the pain?! You guys

didn't know how horrifying screams sounded like out of your own mouths? Why didn't you ask him why he decided to amuse himself with me without a single reason?! The current Xue Yang was bestowed upon you by the past Chang CiAn! The YueyangChang CLAN was only reaping what it had sown!"

Xiao XingChen spoke as though he couldn't believe Xue Yang's words, "Chang CiAn broke one of your fingers in the past. If you sought revenge, you could've simply broken one of his fingers as well. If you really took the matter to heart, you could've broken two, or even all ten! Even if you had cut off an entire arm of his, things wouldn't have been like this. Why did you have to kill his entire clan? Don't tell me that a single finger of yours was equal to more than fifty human lives!"

Xue Yang actually pondered upon the matter, as if he found Xiao XingChen's questions strange, "Of course. My finger was my own, while those lives were other peoples'. They wouldn't be equal no matter how many lives I killed. It was only around fifty. How could it have possibly been equal to one of my fingers?"

Xiao XingChen's face grew paler and paler from Xue Yang's confident tone. He shouted, "Then what about others?! Then why did you wipe out Baixue Temple? Why did you blind Daozhang Song ZiChen's eyes?!"

Xue Yang asked in reply, "Then why did you stop me? Why did you hinder what I wanted to do? Why did you stand up for those dregs of the Chang Clan? You wanted to help Chang CiAn? Or Chang Ping? Hahahaha, how did Chang Ping first cry tears of gratitude? And how did he later beg you not to help him? Daozhang Xiao XingChen, this matter had been your fault, ever since the beginning. You shouldn't have meddled with the rights and wrongs of other people. Who was right, who was wrong; would an outsider be able to understand? Or, maybe you shouldn't have even left the mountain in the first place. Your teacher, BaoShan SanRen, was indeed smart. Why didn't you listen to her and obediently cultivate in the mountains? If you couldn't understand the happenings of this world, then you shouldn't have come!"

It was more than Xiao XingChen could bear, "... Xue Yang, you really are… too disgusting…"

Hearing this, the killing intent that hadn't flashed through Xue Yang's eyes for quite a long while had appeared again.

He laughed bitterly, "Xiao XingChen, this is why I hate you. The people that I hate the most are ones like you who say they're righteous, who think they're virtuous, precisely stupid, naive, dumb idiots like you who think the world's better just because you did something good! You

think I'm disgusting? Very well. Would I care if anybody thinks I'm disgusting? But, on the other hand, are you in a position to be disgusted by me?"

Xiao XingChen paused slightly, "What do you mean?"

A-Qing's and Wei WuXian's hearts were about to jump out of their chests!

Xue Yang spoke in an affectionate manner, "Recently, we haven't went out at night to kill walking corpses, have we? But, a few years ago, didn't we go outside and kill a bunch every couple of days?"

Xiao XingChen's lips moved, as though he was feeling somewhat uneasy, "Why are you bringing this up now?"

Xue Yang, "Nothing, really. It's just really unfortunate that you're blind. You dug out both of your eyes, so you couldn't see those 'walking corpses' that you killed. They were so scared, so pained when you pierced them through the heart. Some even kneeled down and cried and kowtowed for you to let off the young and elderly of their families. If not for how I cut off all of their tongues, I bet they would've been wailing and shouting 'Daozhang, spare us'."

Xiao XingChen's entire body started to tremble.

After a long while, he managed, "You deceived me. You wanted to deceive me."

Xue Yang, "Yes, I deceived you. I've been deceiving you all along. Who would've known that you believed me when I was deceiving you, but now you don't believe me when I'm speaking the truth?"

Xiao XingChen staggered and swung his word toward Xue Yang, shouting, "Be quiet! Be quiet!"

Xue Yang pressed his abdominal area. Snapping with his left hand, he calmly backed away. The expression on his face wasn't that of a human anymore. Green light shone from his eyes. Along with the canine teeth that showed when he smiled, he looked as though he was a living monster. He shouted, "Alright! I'll be quiet! If you still don't believe me, then pass a few moves with the one standing behind you. Make him tell you that if I'm deceiving you or not!"

A sword brought a gust of wind toward him. Xiao XingChen naturally blocked it with Shuanghua. As the two swords clashed, his face immediately grew blank.

Or, one could say that his entire body instantly became a stone statue depicting a withered human.

Xiao XingChen asked with utmost cautiousness, "... Is that you, ZiChen?"

There was no answer.

Song Lan's corpse stood behind him. He appeared as if he was gazing at Xiao XingChen, but there were no pupils within his eyes. He held the sword that clashed with Shuanghua.

The two of them had definitely often learnt from each other by exchanging blows. Even if the two swords had just clashed, Xiao XingChen should be able to tell who the other was from only the strength of the attack. Yet, Xiao XingChen seemed as though he wasn't sure. He turned around slowly and reached out a quivering hand, feeling for the blade of Song Lan's sword.

Song Lan didn't move. Xiao XingChen moved his hand upward from the tip. Finally, one stroke after another, he traced over the characters "Fuxue" that had been carved on the sword.

Xiao XingChen's face grew even paler.

Almost stupefied, he touched the blade of Fuxue, not even noticing that his palm had been grazed. He was trembling so much that even his voice sounded as though it was scattered on the ground, "... ZiChen… Daozhang Song… Daozhang Song… Is that you…?"

Song Lan looked at him without making a sound.

Two frightening holes had already been soaked through the bandages that was wrapped around Xiao XingChen's eyes by blood that never seemed to stop seeping. He wanted to reach out and touch the person who held the sword, but he was too afraid, reaching out, then putting his arms back again. Waves of tearing pain rippled through A-Qing's chest. Both Wei WuXian and she had difficulties breathing. Unable to breathe, tears poured out of her eyes.

Xiao XingChen stood where he was, at a loss of what to do, "... What happened…? Say something…"

He had completely fallen apart, "Can anybody say something?!"

As he had wished, Xue Yang spoke, "Would I still need to tell you who exactly was the walking corpse that you had killed yesterday?"

A .

Shuanghua fell onto the ground.

Xue Yang burst out in laughter.

Xiao XingChen stood blankly in front of Song Lan. Putting his hands on his head, he wailed as though he was ripping his chest apart.

Xue Yang laughed so hard that tears formed in the corners of his eyes. He scowled, “What’s wrong?! You’re so touched to see your old friend again that you’re even crying! Do you want to give him a hug?!”

A-Qing covered her mouth as firm as she could, refusing to let out any trace of her whimpered crying. Inside of the coffin home, Xue Yang paced from one side to the other as he cursed with a terrifying tone of both wrath and ecstasy, “Saving the world! What a joke. You can’t even save yourself!”

Series of sharp pains stabbed at Wei WuXian’s head. This time, the pain wasn’t from A-Qing’s soul.

Crestfallen, Xiao XingChen kneeled on the ground, beside Song Lan’s feet. He squeezed himself close, as though he had shrunk into a small, weak lump of something, almost hoping that he’d disappear from this world. His snowy white robes had already been covered in dust and blood. Xue Yang shouted at him, “You couldn’t do anything, you’ve failed miserably, you’re the only one to blame—you asked for all of this!”

At this moment, Wei WuXian saw himself in Xiao XingChen.

Him, who failed miserably as he stood drenched in blood, who couldn’t do anything except silently acknowledge the critiques and accusations, who was wholly beyond hope, who could only cry in despair!

The white bandages had been stained entirely red. Xiao XingChen’s face was covered in blood. Without eyes to cry with, he could only bleed tears. Having been deceived for years, he took his enemy as a friend, and all of his kindness was stepped over. He thought that he was exorcising ghosts, but his hands were bathed in the blood of the innocent. He even killed his closest friend!

He could only whimper in pain, “Please. Let me go.”

Xue Yang, “Didn’t you want to stab me to death with your sword just a moment ago? Why are you begging me to let you go, now?”

He clearly knew that, with Song Lan’s corpse protecting him, Xiao XingChen wouldn’t be able to pick up his sword again.

He won again. It was an overwhelming victory.

Suddenly, Xiao XingChen snatched up Shuanghua, which had been lying on the ground. Turning the body of the sword, he placed the sharp edge by his neck. The clear radiance of a silver sword glare flashed across Xue Yang’s dark, lightless eyes. Xiao XingChen loosened his hands.
Crimson blood trickled down Shuanghua’s blade.

Following the limpid echo of the sword tumbling to the ground, both Xue Yang’s movement and laughter halted.

After a while of silence, he walked to Xiao XingChen’s motionless corpse. He looked down with bloodshot eyes, the twisted curvature of his lips gradually sinking. Wei WuXian didn’t know if he had accidentally saw wrong, but it seemed that the rim of Xue Yang’s eyes were brimming a reddish tint.

Immediately afterward, he glowered through clenched teeth, “You forced me to do this!”

He then laughed grimly, and spoke to himself, “A dead one is better! Only dead people listen.”

Xue Yang felt for Xiao XingChen’s breathing and squeezed his wrist, as though he thought that he wasn’t dead enough, that he wasn’t rigid enough. He stood up, went into the bedroom on the side, and carried out a basin of water. Using a clean towel, he wiped away all of the blood on Xiao XingChen’s face. He even exchanged the old bandages with new ones, carefully wrapping them around him.

He painted an array on the ground, prepared the materials needed, and properly placed Xiao XingChen inside. He only remembered to look after his own abdominal wound after he had done so many things.

Probably thinking that the two of them would be able to meet after just a short while, his mood grew better and better. He picked up all of the fruits and vegetables that had been scattered on the ground and organized them into the basket again. Out of a rare surge of diligence, he even cleaned the house and placed a new layer of straws into A-Qing’s coffin. At last, he took out the piece of candy that Xiao XingChen gave him last night.

Just as he was about to put it in his mouth, he thought for a bit. Holding the urge back, he put it back again. With one hand holding his chin out of boredom, he waited for Xiao XingChen to sit up.

But it never happened.

The sky had been darkening, and so had Xue Yang's expression. He tapped his fingers irritatedly on the table.

When dusk fell completely, he kicked the table and cursed. Standing up, he half-kneeled in front of Xiao XingChen's corpse, checking over the array and incantations that he had painted. After repeated examinations, he felt that there was nothing wrong. However, after frowning for a moment, he still wiped away all of them and redrew the entire thing.

This time, Xue Yang directly sat on the ground, staring patiently at Xiao XingChen. He waited for another while. A-Qing's legs had already went through three stages of numbness. Now, they both itched and hurt, as though thousands of ants were nibbling on them. Her eyes had been swollen as well from crying. Her sight was a bit blurry.

After another two hours, Xue Yang finally discovered that the situation had gotten out of control.

He put his hand onto Xiao XingChen's forehead, closing his eyes for detection. A moment later, his eyes flew open.

Wei WuXian knew. What he could still detect was probably just a few strands of a fragmented soul.

And, a soul that was broken in such a way that it could never be used to create a fierce corpse.

It seemed that Xue Yang had never expected something like this to happen. On his face, which constantly grinned, an emptiness appeared for the first time.

Without thinking, although it was too late, he pressed his hands against the wound on Xiao XingChen's neck. However, all of the blood had already drained away. Xiao XingChen's face was whiter than paper. Large areas of dark-red blood dried up on his neck. Covering the wound now would do nothing.

Xiao XingChen had died. He had died completely.

Even his soul had shattered.

The child in Xue Yang's story who cried because he couldn't eat pastries was too different from the present him. It was almost impossible to link the two together. Yet, in the current moment, Wei WuXian could finally catch a few traces of that ignorant, confused child on Xue Yang's face.

In an instant, red veins climbed over Xue Yang's eyes. He stood up suddenly. Squeezing both of his hands into fists, he rampaged around the coffin home. He kicked and thrashed, noisily destroying the house that he had just cleaned a few seconds ago.

At this point, his expression, the sounds that he made were closer to the word "insane" than all of his past attitudes added together.

After he smashed everything the house, he calmed down again. He squatted where he had been and called out in a small voice, "Xiao XingChen."

He continued, "If you don't get up, I'll make your dear friend Song Lan murder people.

"I'll kill off everyone in the entire Yi City and make them into living corpses. You've been living here for such a long time. Is it really okay for you not to care?

"I'll strangle that little blind A-Qing and leave her corpse in the fields for wild dogs to gobble her up."

A-Qing shivered soundlessly.

Having received no reply, Xue Yang suddenly shouted out of rage, "Xiao XingChen!"

He yanked at Xiao XingChen's collars, even though it did nothing, and shook it a couple of times as he stared at the lifeless face in his hands.

Suddenly, pulling Xiao XingChen's arm, he lifted him onto his back.

Xue Yang carried the corpse toward the door. As if he had lost his mind, he ranted in a whisper, "Spirit-trapping Pouch, Spirit-trapping Pouch. Right, a Spirit-trapping Pouch. I need a Spirit-trapping Pouch, a Spirit-trapping Pouch, a Spirit-trapping Pouch…"

Only after he was far away did A-Qing dare to move slightly.

Unable to balance herself, she tumbled to the ground, and only crawled up again after writhing for a while. She managed to walk a few more steps forward. As her muscles stretched, she walked faster and faster and faster, and started to run.

After she ran so far that Yi City was far behind her, she finally let out the cries that she buried within herself, “Daozhang! Daozhang! Aaah, Daozhang!...”

The scenario suddenly changed and turned to somewhere else.

At this point, A-Qing had probably already been on the run for a couple of days. She was walking in an unfamiliar town, holding a bamboo pole and pretending to be blind again. She asked whoever came toward her, “Excuse me, are there any big sects around here?”

“Excuse me, are there any really powerful people around the area? Powerful people who cultivate.”

Wei WuXian thought to himself, 2 "
&

Unfortunately, nobody took her questions seriously. They’d often walk away after just a few half-hearted sentences. A-Qing wasn’t discouraged, either. She tirelessly asked, even if she had been shooed away all those times. Seeing that she couldn’t get any answers here, she left and went on a smaller path.

She had been walking and asking for an entire day. Exhausted, she dragged her heavy legs toward a brook. She cupped her hands and drank a few sips of the water, soothing her dry throat. Through the water, she saw a wooden hairpin in her hair, and reached for it.

Looking at the hairpin, A-Qing puckered her lips, wanting to cry again. Her stomach growled, and she took a small, white money pouch out of her lapel. This was the one she stole from Xiao XingChen. She then dug out a small candy from within it, and licked it carefully. After the tip of her tongue tasted the sweetness, she put the candy back again.

This was the last piece of candy Xiao XingChen gave her.

A-Qing looked down and packed the pouch away again. With a glance, she suddenly found that another person’s shadow appeared within the reflection of the water.

Standing in the reflection, Xue Yang was smiling at her.

With a startled scream, A-Qing immediately scrambled away.

Ever since sometime, Xue Yang had been standing behind her. With Shuanghua in his hand, he opened his arms and made the gesture of a hug. He spoke happily, “A-Qing, why are you running away? We haven’t seen each other in such a long time. Don’t you miss me?”

A-Qing shrieked, “Help me!”

Yet, this was already an obscure mountain path. Nobody would come to help her.

Xue Yang raised a brow, “I just happened to have ran into you when you were asking around in the city after I finished my business in Yueyang. What a wonderful turn of fate. Speaking of it, your acting is superb. You even fooled me for such a long time. Well done.”

A-Qing knew that there was no chance of escaping death this time. After the shock, thinking to herself that she’d die anyway, why couldn’t die after cursing all she wanted? Becoming bolder again, she jumped up and spat, “You animal! Thankless wretch! Lower than low bastard! Your parents must’ve made love in a pigpen for a son of a bitch like you to happen! You’re just a germ who grew up eating shit!”

Having used to roam the marketplaces, she had heard more than a great deal of curses and arguments. She spat out whatever profanities that came to her mind. Xue Yang only grinned and listened, “You’re quite good at this, aren’t you? Why haven’t I heard you act so rude in front of Xiao XingChen? You got more coming?”

A-Qing continued, “Fuck you shameless filth! And you still dare to mention Daozhang and hold Daozhang’s sword! Do you deserve to hold it? You’re dirtying his belonging!”

Xue Yang held up Shuanghua with his left hand, “Oh, you mean this? It’s mine now. Did you think your daozhang is any cleaner? After this, he’ll also be my…”

A-Qing, “You piece of shit! Dream on! You don’t deserve to call Daozhang unclean. You’re just a pool of spittle! Daozhang must be the unluckiest man in the world to have met you! You’re the only one who’s dirty! It’s only a disgusting pool of spittle like you!”

Xue Yang’s expression finally darkened.

Having been on the edge for such a long time, now that the moment had finally arrived, A-Qing felt strangely relieved.

Xue Yang spoke in a cold tone, “Since you like pretending to be blind so much, why don’t you become truly blind?”

With a wave of his hand, some sort of powder came at her face and went into her eyes. Immediately, everything she could see became a bloody red, then turned into darkness.

Stung by the scorching pain on her eyes, A-Qing let out a blood-curdling screech. Xue Yang’s voice came again, “You’re too talkative. You won’t need your tongue anymore, either.”

The crisp rings of the silver bell sounded as though they were right beside Wei WuXian, yet he was still immersed in A-Qing’s emotions, unable to come back to his senses. His head spun as well.

Lan JingYi waved a hand in front of him, “There is not reaction? What if he lost his marbles?!”

Jin Ling, “I said already that Empathy is very dangerous!”

Lan JingYi, “Well it was because your head was up in the clouds and did not ring the bell in time.”

Jin Ling’s face froze, “I…”

Luckily, Wei WuXian had finally came to. He stood up against the coffin. A-Qing, having already left his body, leaned on the coffin as well. The boys swarmed around him as though they were a litter of piglets and all talk at the same time, “He’s up, he’s up!”

“Whew, he hasn’t lost his marbles.”

“Hasn’t he lost his marbles to begin with?”

“Don’t talk nonsense!”

With loud chatters surrounding his ears, Wei WuXian spoke up, “Don’t be so loud. My head feels awful.”

They quieted at once. Wei WuXian looked down, reached into the coffin, and slightly opened Xiao XingChen’s collars. As he had expected, at his neck, there was a thin yet fatal wound.

Wei WuXian sighed in silence and turned to A-Qing, “Thanks for all the trouble.”

The reason why A-Qing's ghost was blind but she wasn't as slow or careful as other blind people was that she only became truly blind the moment before she died. Before, she had always been such a fast, lively maiden.

In these years, she hid alone within the fog of Yi City, stealthily going against Xue Yang by scaring away the humans who had entered the city and warning them, directing them outside. Just how much courage and dedication did she have to be able to do this?

Beside the edge of the coffin, A-Qing put her palms together and saluted Wei WuXian for a couple of times. Then, using her bamboo pole as a sword, she made the "kill, kill, kill" gestures that she had always played around with.

Wei WuXian replied, "Don't worry." He turned to the disciples, "Stay here, all of you. The walking corpses in the city won't be able to come here. I'll be back soon."

Lan JingYi couldn't help but asked, "Just what did you see during Empathy?"

Wei WuXian, "It's too long of a story. I'll tell you later."

Jin Ling, "Can't you sum it up? Don't leave us at a cliffhanger!"

Wei WuXian, "In summary: Xue Yang must die."

Amid the dense fog that stretched as far as the eye could see, the knocks of A-Qing's pole led the way for him. The two moved rapidly and immediately returned to where the fight happened.

Lan WangJi and Xue Yang had already went outside. The sword glares of Bichen and Jiangzai clashed—the fight was at a critical moment. Bichen was calm and unhurried, gaining the upper hand, while Jiangzai lashed out as though it was a rabid dog, somehow managing to keep up.
However, within the dreadful white fog, Lan WangJi had difficulties with vision, yet since Xue Yang had lived so many years in the city like A-Qing, he was able to know where he was even if he closed his eyes. Thus, the fight was in a deadlock. Notes of the guqin sometimes thundered through the fog, preventing the groups of walking corpses that wanted to approach. Just as Wei WuXian was about to take out his flute, two black figures slammed in front of him as if they were two iron pagodas. Wen Ning was pressing Song Lan onto the ground. Both corpses held each other's necks with their hands, their knuckles cracking loudly.

Wei WuXian commanded, "Hold him down!"

He bent down and quickly found the ends of the two nails that went through Song Lan's head. He felt relieved at once. The nails were a lot thinner than the ones inside Wen Ning's head and the material used was different as well. It shouldn't be too difficult to bring Song Lan back to consciousness. He immediately pinched the two ends and started to slowly pull the nails out. Feeling strange objects stirring within his head, Song Lan widened his eyes and growled in a low voice. Wen Ning only prevented him from breaking loose after he exerted more strength on him. When the nails had been pulled out, at once, as though he was a puppet whose strings had been cut off, he collapsed on the ground and ceased to move.

Suddenly, a furious roar came from where the other two fought, "Give it back!"

Chapter 42 Grasses—Part Ten

Lan WangJi's sword had slashed across Xue Yang's chest. Not only did he bleed, the Spirit-trapping Pouch that he hid in his lapels had been taken out by the Bichen's tip as well. Wei WuXian, though, couldn't see what was happening, "Xue Yang! What do you want him to give back to you? Shuanghua? It's not like Shuanghua is your sword to begin with, so why do you say 'give it back'? Do you know no shame?"

Xue Yang laughed loudly, "Senior Wei, you really don't want to show me any mercy, do you?"

Wei WuXian, "Laugh. Go on. Even if you die laughing, you won't be able to piece together Xiao XingChen's soul. He was so disgusted by you, yet you still want to bring him back to play games."

Abruptly, Xue Yang shouted, "Who wants to play games with him?!"

Wei WuXian, "Then why did you kneel and beg me so that I can help you mend his soul?"

Of course, someone as sharp as Xue Yang knew that Wei WuXian was purposely diverting him, first to distract him with anger, second to make him raise his voice so that Lan WangJi could tell where he was and attack. Even so, he replied in spite of himself. He spoke in a cruel voice, "Why did I do so? Hah! How can you not know? I want to make him into a fierce corpse, an evil spirit, so that I can control him! Didn't he want to be a virtuous person? Then, I'll make it so that he never stops killing, so that he'll never be at peace!"

Wei WuXian, "Hmm? You hate him that much? Then why did you kill Chang Ping?"

Xue Yang sneered, "Why did I kill Chang Ping? Did you really need to ask, Patriarch YiLing?! Haven't I told you? I said that I was going to wipe out the entire YueyangChang Clan, so I won't even leave a dog behind!"

Whenever he talked, it was as though he was announcing his location. The sounds of a blade piercing through flesh kept coming, but Xue Yang's tolerance for pain was much higher than those of normal people. Wei WuXian had seen during Empathy that even if he was pierced through the stomach, he could laugh as if nothing had happened.

Wei WuXian continued, "That's a great reason you came up with. Unfortunately, the years don't add up. Someone like you who seeks revenge for the smallest things and murders in such

ruthless ways wouldn't have waited so many years to finish off one clan, would you? You know the reason why you killed Chang Ping."

Xue Yang, "Then, tell me. What do I know? What do I know?!"

He shouted the last sentence. Wei WuXian asked again, "You didn't just kill him. Why did you choose to use lingchi, the torture that represents 'punishment'? If you were avenging for yourself, why did you use Shuanghua, instead of your own Jiangzai? Why did you dig out his eyes and make it so that he was just like Xiao XingChen?"

Xue Yang shouted himself hoarse, "Nonsense! That's all nonsense! It's revenge—why in the world would I have let him die comfortably?"

Wei WuXian, "You were indeed seeking revenge, but whose revenge were you actually seeking? What a joke. If you wanted to seek revenge, the one you should've executed lingchi on is yourself!"

With two whooshes, the sharp noises of something slicing the air came right at him. Wei WuXian didn't even flinch. Wen Ning darted in front of him and intercepted two nails that shone a cruel, black light. Xue Yang let off a series of horrifying laughter, as though he was a screeching owl. The laughter died down at once, and he quieted. He ceased to pay heed to Wei WuXian and went back to fighting with Lan WangJi amid the fog.

Wei WuXian thought in silence, 3
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Suddenly, a series of crisp knocks came from within the fog.

Thinking quick, Wei WuXian shouted, "Lan Zhan, attack where the pole knocks!"

Lan WangJi lunged at once. Xue Yang let out a suppressed moan. A moment later, the bamboo pole sounded again, at a place a few meters away!

Lan WangJi continued to attack where the noise came from. Xue Yang threatened, "Little Blind, aren't you scared that I'll break you into pieces, following me around like that?"

Ever since she was killed by Xue Yang, A-Qing had always been hiding so that he didn't find her. However, for some reason, Xue Yang didn't really care about such a ghost either, as though

he felt that she was too weak to be cautious of. Now, though, A-Qing followed behind Xue Yang as if she was his shadow. Knocking her bamboo pole and revealing his location, she pointed out to Lan WangJi where he should attack!

Xue Yang's movements were extremely quick. He immediately appeared somewhere else. When she lived, A-Qing had also been a fast runner. Now that she was a ghost, she stuck closely to him as though she was a curse. She knocked her pole on the ground as quickly as she could. The crisp taps sounded near and far, left and right, in front and behind. They were impossible to avoid. As soon as they sounded, Bichen's sword glare followed immediately!

In the beginning, Xue Yang moved through the fog as though a fish amid water. He could both hide and sneak attacks however he wanted to. Yet, now, he had to spare attention to deal with A-Qing. With a curse, he quickly threw a talisman behind him. Immediately after the split second of distraction, following A-Qing's bone-chilling screech, Bichen pierced through his chest!

Although A-Qing's ghost had already been destroyed by Xue Yang's talisman and there ceased to be any noise that revealed where he was, the attack was vital. Xue Yang couldn't continue to be as unpredictable as before!

From amid the fog came the noises of someone coughing up blood. Wei WuXian tossed out a Spirit-trapping Pouch for it to save A-Qing's soul. With heavy steps, Xue Yang walked for a while, then suddenly launched forward. With his hands extended, he roared, "Give me it!"

Bichen's blue light split through the air. Lan WangJi cleanly severed off one of his arms.

Blood spurted out at once. In front of Wei WuXian, a large area of white fog had been stained red. The scent of blood was so overwhelming that even a single breath brought in a moist, rusty odor. However, he didn't care about it at all. He concentrated on solely searching and absorbing the soul of A-Qing that had been scattered. On the other hand, although Xue Yang didn't make a single noise, there came the heavy sound of knees dropping onto the ground. It seemed that he had lost so much blood that he finally collapsed, unable to walk any further.

Lan WangJi summoned Bichen again. The next attack would cut off Xue Yang's head!

Yet, suddenly, blue flames shot from the fog-covered earth to the sky.

It was fire from a transportation talisman!

Wei WuXian knew that the situation wasn't bright. Not caring for the dangers within the fog, he rushed over. Immediately afterward, he had almost slipped on the ground. Where the bloody

scent was strongest, the ground was covered in wet, still-fresh blood, all from Xue Yang's severed arm.

However, Xue Yang was gone.

Lan WangJi walked over. Wei WuXian asked, "The gravedigger?"

Xue Yang's most vital organ had been injured by Bichen, and he lost an arm as well. Judging from the amount of blood loss, he'd die for sure. It'd have been impossible for him to still have enough energy and spiritual powers to use a transportation talisman.

Lan WangJi nodded slightly, "I gave the gravedigger three blows. As he was close to being captured, a group of walking corpses attacked and allowed him the opportunity to escape."

Wei WuXian spoke with a serious expression, "Although he was injured, the gravedigger still brought away Xue Yang's corpse, even though it cost him extensive spiritual powers. He probably knew who Xue Yang was and what he could do. Bringing away Xue Yang's corpse… was to search if he carried the Stygian Tiger Seal with him."

It was rumored that, after Xue Yang had been "eliminated" by Jin GuangYao, the Stygian Tiger Seal was lost. But, seeing from the current situation, it was very likely that he carried the seal with him. Tens of thousands of walking corpses, even fierce corpses, had been gathered in Yi City. They would've been extremely difficult to control with only corpse-poisoning powder and nails through the skull. Only the Stygian Tiger Seal could explain how Xue Yang commanded them at his wish, ordering them to obey him and attack for him. Somebody as crafty and mistrustful as him definitely wouldn't put the Tiger Seal somewhere they couldn't see. Only keeping it on him at all times would've made him feel a sense of security. When the gravedigger brought away his corpse, he brought away the Stygian Tiger Seal as well.

This was no trivial matter at all. Wei WuXian's voice was stern, "Now that the situation is already like this, we can only hope that there's a limit to the powers of the Tiger Seal that Xue Yang restored."

Suddenly, with a light toss, Lan WangJi passed something to him.

Wei WuXian caught it perfectly, "What is it?"

Lan WangJi, "The right hand."

He had tossed over a new Qiankun Pouch. Having finally remembered why they had came to Yi City at the first place, Wei WuXian brightened up, “The right hand of our dear friend?”

Lan WangJi, “Mnn.”

Under the obstructions of the gravedigger, the groups of walking corpses, and the thick fog, Lan WangJi still managed to successfully find the right hand of the corpse. Wei WuXian was more than pleased. He praised, “I expected no less from HanGuang-Jun! Now, we’re one step ahead of them again. What a pity that it’s not the head. I wanted to see what our dear friend looks like. Well, I guess it’d happen soon enough… Where’s Song Lan?”

After Xue Yang’s corpse disappeared, the circulation of the fog quickened. It seemed to have thinned and the surroundings became somewhat easier to see. Because of this, Wei WuXian suddenly noticed that Song Lan was gone. At where he had originally lay, only Wen Ning still squatted on the ground, staring at them blankly.

Lan WangJi put his hand back to Bichen, which he had already unsheathed. Wei WuXian stopped him, “It’s fine. There’s no need to be alarmed. Song Lan, or the fierce corpse back there, probably doesn’t have killing intentions anymore, or else Wen Ning would’ve alerted us. It’s likely that he regained consciousness and left on his own.”

He whistled lightly. Wen Ning stood up and proceeded to leave, his figure disappearing into the fog. The noises of chains dragging on the ground gradually faded into the distance. Lan WangJi didn’t say anything more. He calmly turned to Wei WuXian, “Let us go.”

Just as they were about to leave, suddenly, Wei WuXian stopped, “Wait.”

He saw something lying alone in the blood.

It was a severed left arm. Four of the fingers were closed tightly. The little finger was missing.

The fist of the arm was firmly clenched. Wei WuXian squatted down. Only by using most of his strength did he succeed in prying the fingers open one by one. After the fist had been opened, he found that it held a small piece of candy.

The piece of candy was tinted slightly black. It was definitely not edible

anymore. It had been clenched so tightly that it was almost crushed.

Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi returned to the coffin home together. The doors were open. As they had expected, Song Lan was standing beside the coffin that Xiao XingChen lay in, looking inside with his head hanging low.

All of the disciples unsheathed their swords. They huddled on the side, staring cautiously at the fierce corpse that had just attacked them. Seeing that Wei WuXian and Lan WangJi returned, they looked as if their lives had been saved, yet they were too scared to make any noise, afraid of alarming or infuriating Song Lan.

Wei WuXian walked into the coffin home and introduced to Lan WangJi, “This is Song Lan, Daozhang Song ZiChen.”

Standing by the coffin, Song Lan raised his head and turned to them. Lifting up the hem of his robes, Lan WangJi stepped over the high threshold in an elegant manner, then nodded.

Since Song Lan had regained his consciousness, his pupils returned as well. A pair of clear, black eyes stared back at them.

Amid the eyes that had originally been Xiao XingChen’s, a deep, indescribable sorrow brimmed.

Thus, there was no need to ask any questions. Wei WuXian knew already. During the period that Xue Yang made him into a fierce corpse and commanded him, he saw and remembered everything.

No matter how much more they inquired, how much more they talked, it’d only lay more emphasis on the pain and hopelessness.

After a moment of silence, Wei WuXian took out two Spirit-trapping Pouches of the same small size. He handed them to Song Lan, “Daozhang Xiao XingChen and Maiden A-Qing.”

Even though A-Qing was extremely scared of Xue Yang, a while ago, she still followed closely behind the one who killed her, refusing to let him dodge or escape until, finally, he was pierced through the heart by Bichen and got what he deserved. From a slap of the talisman, she had almost disappeared. Wei WuXian only brought back a few fragments by searching and piecing as hard as he could. However, now, it was also rather scattered, the same as Xiao XingChen.

Of the two lumps of weak souls, each was curled up in its Spirit-trapping Pouch. It was as if just a slight bump would cause them to dissipate within the pouch. With shaking hands, Song Lan took them over and rested them on top of his palm. He didn’t even dare to carry them by the strings, afraid that they’d sway too much.

Wei WuXian asked, “Daozhang Song, what do you intend on doing with Daozhang Xiao XingChen’s corpse?”

With one hand carefully cupping the two pouches, he pulled out Fuxue with his other hand and wrote two lines on the ground, “Incinerate the corpse. Look after the soul.”

Now that Xiao XingChen’s soul was so shattered, it definitely couldn’t return to its body, so incinerating the corpse wouldn’t be a bad idea. With the body gone and only a pure soul left, after being diligently looked after, maybe the day would come when it returned again.

Wei WuXian nodded, “What do you intend on doing afterwards?”

Song Lan wrote, “Roam this world with Shuanghua. Exorcise evil beings alongside XingChen.” After a pause, he continued, “When he wakes, say I’m sorry, it wasn’t your fault.”

This was what he couldn’t tell Xiao XingChen before he died.

The fog of Yi City was gradually melting away. One could already manage to see the roads and intersections. Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian led the group of disciples out of the deserted city. In front of the city gates, Song Lan parted with them.

He still wore the dark cultivation robes. Standing alone, he carried two swords, Shuanghua and Fuxue, he brought two souls, Xiao XingChen and A-Qing, and walked another path.

Not the one that led them to Yi City.

Lan SiZhui stared at his leaving figure, “‘Xiao XingChen, the bright moon, the gentle breeze; Song ZiChen, the distant snow, the bitter frost’... I wonder if the two of them would be able to meet each other again.”

Wei WuXian walked over the road covered in weeds. Suddenly, he saw a patch of grass and thought to himself, / " " & #'> !

Lan JingYi, “Now you should tell us what you really saw during Empathy, right? Why would the person be Xue Yang? Why did he pretend to be Xiao XingChen?”

“And, also, was that the Ghost General? Where did the Ghost General go? Why do we not see him anymore? Is he still in Yi City? Why did he appear so suddenly?”

Wei WuXian pretended as though he didn't hear the second series of questions, "Well, this is a very complicated story…"

As they walked, after he finished telling the story, everyone was so depressed that nobody still remembered the Ghost General.

Lan JingYi was the first one to cry, "Why would something like this exist?!"

Jin Ling raged, "That Xue Yang is such a filthy scumbag! Death was letting him off too lightly! If Fairy were here, I would've made her chomp him to death!"

Wei WuXian was terrified. If Fairy had been here, before Xue Yang died, he himself would've been scared to death.

The boy who had complimented A-Qing through the door slit stomped his feet, "Maiden A-Qing, oh, Maiden A-Qing!"

Lan JingYi cried the loudest. He looked awful, but this time, nobody reminded him to keep his voice low, since Lan SiZhui's eyes were red as well. It was fortunate that Lan WangJi didn't silence him. Lan JingYi suggested through snot and tears, "We should go burn some paper money for Daozhang Xiao XingChen and Maiden A-Qing. There is a village in front of the road fork over there, right? Let us buy some things and pray for them."

Everyone agreed, "Sure, sure!"

As they talked, they arrived at the village. Lan JingYi and Lan SiZhui impatiently scurried inside and carried out a few random incense sticks, candles, and paper money. Walking over to the side, they built something that resembled a stove using bricks and rocks. The boys then squatted around it and started to burn paper money, muttering as they fanned the fire. Wei WuXian wasn't in a great mood either. On the way here, he didn't even tell many jokes. Seeing this, though, he finally couldn't bear it any longer. He turned to Lan WangJi, "HanGuang-Jun, look at what they're doing right in front of other people's doors. You're not even stopping them."

Lan WangJi replied in an indifferent tone, "You can stop them."

Wei WuXian, "Fine. I'll discipline them for you."

And he went over, "Am I seeing things? All of you are disciples of prominent sects. Your parents and relatives must've taught you that dead people can't receive paper money, right? Why

would dead people want money? They can't receive those. And, you're in front of somebody's doors. If you burn them here…"

Lan JingYi waved at him, "Shoo, shoo. You are blocking the wind. It will not be able to burn anymore. And, it is not like you have died, so how do you know that dead people do not receive paper money?"

With a face covered in tears and ashes, another boy turned to him and agreed, "That's right. How do you know? What if they can actually receive them?"

Wei WuXian murmured, "How do I know?"

Of course he knew!

During the ten-or-so years when he had been dead, he hadn't even received one single piece of paper money!

Lan JingYi stabbed another knife into his heart, "Even if you could not receive them, it was probably because nobody burned them for you."

Wei WuXian asked himself in silence, , "
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The more he thought about it, the more he felt that it was impossible. He turned around and whispered to Lan WangJi, "HanGuang-Jun, have you burnt paper money for me? At least you've burnt paper money for me, right?"

Lan WangJi glanced at him. He looked down, dusting away the ashes that stuck to the bottom of his sleeve, then stared quietly into the distance, giving not a single word in reply.

Looking at his calm face, Wei WuXian thought to himself, :

Had he really not burnt anything?!

Suddenly, a villager walked over with a bow on his back. He seemed rather annoyed, "Why are you burning these here? It's in front of my house. How ominous!"

These boys hadn't done anything like this before and didn't know that it was ominous to burn paper money in front of someone's house. All of them apologized. Lan SiZhui hurried to wipe his face, "Is that your house over there?"

The villager, "Hey, brat, look at what you're saying. My family's been here for three generations. How can it possibly be anything but my house?"

Hearing his tone, Jin Ling grew unhappy at once and was about to stand up, "How dare you talk to us like this?"

Wei WuXian pressed his head and held him down again. Lan SiZhui continued, "I understand now. Sorry, I did not mean anything else with the question I asked. It was just that, the last time we passed this house, we saw another hunter, which was why we were confused."

The villager was puzzled, "Another hunter? What do you mean another hunter?"

He made a "three" with his fingers, "This house was passed straight down through the three generations. There's only me, no other brothers! My dad passed away long ago and I haven't even married much less had a child. Where on Earth would there be another hunter?"

Lan JingYi, "There really was!"

He stood up as well, "He wore a lot of clothes and had a big cap on, sitting right in your yard repairing his bow and arrows, as though he was going to hunt soon. When we arrived, we even asked him for the directions. He was the one who pointed us to Yi City!"

The villager spat, "Nonsense! You really saw him in my yard? Nobody like him exists in my household! Even ghosts could beat up humans in a place like Yi City. He directed you there? More like he wanted to kill you! The thing you saw was definitely a ghost!"

He spat a couple of times, venting out his anger, then shook his head and turned around to leave. The boys were left staring at one another. Lan JingYi was still protesting, "But he really was sitting in this yard. I remember really clearly that…"

Wei WuXian said a few things to Lan WangJi. He then turned around, "You understand now? Somebody led you to Yi City. The hunter who directed you there wasn't a villager here at all. He was disguised by someone with ill intentions."

Jin Ling, "Was it that somebody had been leading us here ever since the corpses of the cats? Was the fake hunter the one who did all those things?"

Wei WuXian, “Most likely so.”

Lan SiZhui wondered, “Why did he spend so much effort leading us to Yi City?”

Wei WuXian, “We still don’t know. But, after this, please be careful. If you run into such strange things again, don’t go tracking them down alone. First contact your sects and work together with a large group of people. If not for how HanGuang-Jun also happened to be at Yi City, you might’ve even died.”

Imagining what would’ve happened if they were stuck in Yi City, a lot of the disciples felt their hair standing up. No matter if they ended up surrounded by groups of corpses or facing the living demon Xue Yang, the situation would’ve been absolutely terrifying.

Walking with the disciples, after a while, when the sky had almost darkened, Lan WangJi and Wei WuXian finally arrived at the city where the dog and donkey had been placed.

The city was not only brightly lit, but also filled with the chatter of people. The disciples all exclaimed that this finally seemed like a place where humans lived.

Wei WuXian extended his arms toward the donkey and shouted, “Lil’ Apple!”

Lil’ Apple brayed as though it was mad. Immediately, Wei WuXian heard the barks of a dog. He darted behind Lan WangJi at once. Fairy had also rushed over. The dog and the donkey stood on opposite sides and snarled at each other.

Lan WangJi, “Leash it. It is time to eat.”

Dragging Wei WuXian, who was almost glued to his back, he walked toward the second floor, following the tea servant. Jin Ling and the rest wanted to follow, yet Lan WangJi turned around and gave them an obscure glance. Lan SiZhui immediately told the others, “The elders’ and the juniors’ rooms should be separated. We can stay on the first floor.”

Lan WangJi nodded and continued to walk up, his face as detached as always. Jin Ling stood on the stairs hesitantly, unsure of whether to go up or down. Wei WuXian turned around and grinned, “The adults and the children should be separated. It’s best if you don’t see some of the things that happen.”

Jin Ling’s lips twitched, “Who’d want to see that!”

Lan WangJi told a servant to prepare one table downstairs for the group of disciples and a private room upstairs for Wei WuXian and him. The two sat across from each other.

Wei WuXian, “HanGuang-Jun, listen to me. Please don’t have your sect handle all of the aftermath of Yi City alone. It’s such a big city. If you really want to tidy the place up, it’d cost you a lot in terms of many aspects. It’ll be quite difficult. Shuzhong isn’t under the administration of the GusuLan Sect anyways. Count the disciples downstairs and see which sects they came from. Add their sects up as well. Those sects should also help you.”

Lan WangJi, “I will consider it.”

Wei WuXian, “Yes, please do. Everyone likes to fight for the preys and push around the responsibilities. Now, if your sect is taken advantage of, even if it’s for the good of them, they might not feel grateful or understand why you did it. If this repeats too much, they’d take it as granted that your sect always takes care of such things. That’s how things are in this world.”

After a pause, he continued, “But, speaking of it, they really are unlucky. Yi City is too remote and there aren’t any lookout towers around it. Or else, Jin Ling, SiZhui, and the rest wouldn’t have accidentally barged in. Maiden A-Qing and Daozhang Xiao XingChen’s souls wouldn’t have stayed hidden for all these years either.”

No matter how big or how small, there were as many cultivational sects as stars in a night sky. Most were situated at flourishing cities that could be conveniently accessed or spiritual grounds with beautiful scenery. The sects, however, were unwilling to be stationed at certain remote areas. Rogue cultivators rarely travelled to those places either. Thus, when evil beings haunted, the dwellers there usually suffered in silence, unable to find help anywhere.

When the previous leader of the LanlingJin Sect, Jin GuangShan, was still alive, Jin GuangYao had brought the matter up before. However, it would have cost a great deal and Jin GuangShan wasn’t overly enthusiastic about the idea either. Also since, back then, the LanlingJin Sect’s leadership wasn’t as powerful, the matter wasn’t seen as important, and nothing ended up happening.

After Jin GuangYao officially succeeded the position of Sect Leader and became the Chief Cultivator, he immediately gathered people and resources from the sects, and started to carry out his past goals. In the beginning, the voices of opposition were deafening. A lot of people suspected that the LanlingJin Sect used it to gain personal benefits and stuff its own pockets. With a smiling face, Jin GuangYao persisted for five years. During the years, he allied but also fell out with countless people. Using both gentle and forceful methods, he did all that he could

and what he wished for was finally completed. More than twelve hundred “lookout towers” had been built.

These “lookout towers” were scattered around the more remote places. Every one of them were assigned disciples from certain sects. If anything strange happened, they’d take action at once. When they couldn’t deal with the matter, they’d send out messages to other sects or rogue cultivators for help. Even if the cultivators who came wanted something in return while the locals were too poor to give them any, the money that the LanlingJin Sect gathered throughout each year would be enough to support them.

All of these happened after the death of the YiLing Patriarch. Wei WuXian only heard the ins and outs from Lan WangJi after they passed a few lookout towers during their journey. Rumors had it that Koi Tower was preparing to build the next batch of lookout towers, increasing them to three thousand in number so that they covered a greater area. Although after the first lookout towers were built, they received widespread approvals due to their notable effects, the voices of suspicion and ridicule had never died either. When the time came, the cultivation world would definitely be thrown into chaos again.

Not long later, both the food and the liquor arrived. Wei WuXian glanced over the table, pretending as if he didn’t mean it. Almost all of the dishes were covered in red. Paying attention to Lan WangJi’s chopsticks, he notes that he ate mostly from the milder dishes, rarely the bright-red ones. Even when he did, his expression remained the exact same. Wei WuXian felt something tug at his heart.

Having noticed his gaze, Lan WangJi asked, “What is wrong?”

Wei WuXian slowly poured himself a cup of liquor, “I want somebody to drink with me.”

Chapter 43 Allure—Part One

He never actually expected Lan WangJi to drink with him, and simply finished the liquor in his own cup. However, staring silently at him, Lan WangJi gently swept his own sleeves aside. He poured a cup for himself as well and, after a pause, he slowly downed the liquor.

Wei WuXian was quite surprised, "HanGuang-Jun, you really are considerate, aren't you? You're really gonna drink with me?"

The last time they drank together, Wei WuXian didn't pay much attention to Lan WangJi's expression. This time, however, he went out of his way to scrutinize it.

Lan WangJi closed his eyelids when he drank. With a faint frown, he finished the liquor, and only opened his eyes again after subtly pursing up his lips. A blanket of mist even seemed to have fallen over his eyes.

Resting his chin in his hand, Wei WuXian started to count in silence. As he had expected, when he reached the number eight, Lan WangJi put the cup down. He touched his forehead, closed his eyes, and fell asleep.

Wei WuXian was completely convinced—Lan WangJi really did fall asleep before he woke up drunk!

For some unknown reason, he was starting to feel a bit eager. Finishing all of the leftover liquor in one gulp, Wei WuXian stood up and paced around the room, his hands folded behind him. After a while, he walked toward Lan WangJi, bent down, and whispered by his ear, "Lan Zhan?"

There was no reply. Wei WuXian continued, "WangJi-xiong?"

Lan WangJi was leaning his head on his right hand. His breathing was calmer than ever.

Both his features and the hand at his forehead were impeccably fair in color. He looked as if he was a piece of fine jade.

The faint fragrance of sandalwood that surrounded him had originally been cold, somewhat grim. Now, however, as it combined with the liquor's mellow aroma, a few tinges of warmth rippled through the coldness. As though a saccharine whisp had wound its way through, the scent could almost be described as intoxicating.

Now that Wei WuXian was near enough, the scent intertwined with his breaths. He couldn't help but bent down further so that he was even closer to Lan WangJi. Vaguely, he thought to himself, 2 +

Amid the fusion of liquor and sandalwood, his face inched nearer and nearer, while he himself didn't notice it at all. His voice had lowered as well. In an almost teasing manner, he murmured, "Second… Bro-..."

Suddenly, a voice entered his ears, "Young Master…"

Wei WuXian's face was already less than an inch away from Lan WangJi's. The word "Brother" was at the tip of his tongue as well. Startled by the sound, he almost fell onto the ground with a slip of his feet.

He immediately positioned himself in front of Lan WangJi. Then, he turned to the wooden windows of where the voice came from.

A careful knock could be heard through the windows, then a small voice drifted through the slit, "Young Master…"

Wei WuXian finally noticed that his heart was beating a bit too fast. He puzzled over it again, then regained his composure. Walking over, he raised the window to see a black-clothed figure dangling upside-down with legs hung at the roof, preparing to knock once more. Wei WuXian quickly opened the window, which bumped into the person's head. The figure exclaimed with a light . Holding the windows back with both of his hands, he finally made eye contact with Wei WuXian.

A cold breeze barged into the room. Wen Ning's eyes were opened, no longer an ashen white, but instead filled with a pair of black, silent pupils.

The two stayed like this, one standing, one hanging, and stared at each other for a few moments.

Wei WuXian, "Come down."

With a sudden loss of balance, Wen Ning fell and slammed onto the ground outside the inn.

Wei WuXian wiped away the nonexistent sweat on his forehead.

He commented, $

It was a good thing that they chose this inn. For the sake of tranquility, the windows of the private room faced a small grove instead of the streets. Using the support pole, Wei WuXian left the windows open and looked down, leaning outside. With his heavy body, Wen Ning made a man-shaped dent on the ground. He was still staring at Wei WuXian even as he lay in the dent.

In a hushed voice, Wei WuXian shouted at him, “I told you to come down, not go down. ‘Come’, you understand?”

Wen Ning looked up at him. Dusting off his clothes, he crawled out of the dent and hurried to reply, “Oh. I’m coming.”

As soon as he finished, he clung to a pillar and prepared to climb. Wei WuXian interrupted him at once, “Stop! Stay where you are. I’ll come get you.”

He returned to Lan WangJi and leaned down toward his ears, “Lan Zhan, oh, Lan Zhan. sleep for a while longer. I’ll be back before you know it. Won’t you be a good boy?”

After he spoke, he felt a strange urge. He couldn’t help but brushed the tip of his finger against Lan WangJi’s eyelashes.

In a slight manner, Lan WangJi’s lashes trembled and his brows twitched. He looked rather perturbed. Removing his hand, Wei WuXian leaped out the window. He hopped a few times on the branches by the roof, then landed on the ground. Right after he turned around, Wen Ning kneeled down in front him.

Wei WuXian, “What are you doing?”

Wen Ning said nothing, his head hanging low.

Wei WuXian asked again, “Do you really have to talk to me like this?”

Wen Ning lowered his voice, “Young Master, I’m sorry.”

Wei WuXian, “Well then.”

Immediately after he spoke, he kneeled in front of Wen Ning as well. Startled, Wen Ning proceeded to kowtow him, while Wei WuXian soon returned the kowtow as well. Wen Ning was so alarmed that he jumped up at once. Only then did Wei WuXian stand up again, sweeping off the dirt at his hems, “You could’ve just stood straight and talked to me, you know?”

Wen Ning was still looking at the ground, afraid to say anything. Wei WuXian asked, “When did you regain consciousness?”

Wen Ning, “Just a while ago.”

Wei WuXian, “Do you still remember the things that happened when the nails were in your head?”

Wen Ning, “Some… but not all.”

Wei WuXian, “What do you remember?”

Wen Ning, “That I’d been chained in a really dark place. I think people sometimes came to check on me.”

Wei WuXian, “Do you remember who they were?”

Wen Ning, “No, only that somebody nailed something into my head.”

Wei WuXian, “It was probably Xue Yang. He also used those nails to control Song Lan. He used to be a guest cultivator at the LanlingJin Sect, but we still don’t know whether he did such a thing out of his own intentions or was it the LanlingJin Sect’s wishes.” After giving it some thought, he continued, “Most likely, it was out of the LanlingJin Sect’s wishes. Back then, they all said that you’d been completely annihilated. If the LanlingJin Sect didn’t take part in this, he wouldn’t have been able to hide the truth all on his own.” With a pause, he asked again, “Then, what happened afterwards? How did you go to Dafan Mountain?”

Wen Ning, “Afterwards, I don’t know how long had passed, but I suddenly heard someone clap, and then, Young Master, you said ‘wake up,’ so I… struggled out of the chains and rushed outside…”

It was the command that Wei WuXian gave to the three fierce corpses at Mo Village.

In the past, Wei WuXian had given the Ghost General countless commands. Thus, he also heard the first command that Wei WuXian gave after he came back to this world.

And so, in a muddled state of mind, Wen Ning followed other corpses’ directions and Wei WuXian’s commands. The LanlingJin Sect, on the other hand, knew that they couldn’t make public the fact that they’d been hiding the Ghost General. Or else, if the news leaked out, not only would its own reputation be damaged, the people would also start to panic, which was why

even though Wen Ning ran away, they didn't dare to pursue him with any fanfare. After a mess of a journey, Wen Ning finally reached Wei WuXian, who was playing the flute on top of Dafan Mountain, and the two successfully met again.

Wei WuXian sighed, "You said that you 'don't know how long had passed'. It's already been more than ten years." He continued after a short pause, "Well, it's fair to say that I don't know much more than you do. Do you want me to tell you some of the things that happened?"

Wen Ning, "I've heard of some."

Wei WuXian, "Like what?"

Wen Ning, "I heard that the) are gone, that everyone… is gone."

Truthfully, Wei WuXian had only wanted to tell him about the more trivial gossip, such as how the rules of the Lan Sect had increased from three thousand to four thousand. Not at all expecting Wen Ning to bring up such a grave topic to start with, he could only stay silent.

Despite of this being a grave topic, Wen Ning's tone wasn't mournful at all, as though he had already known that it would've happened. In reality, though, this was indeed the case. They expected the worst-case scenario countless times, as early as more than a decade ago.

After a moment of silence, Wei WuXian asked again, "What else have you heard?"

Wen Ning whispered, "Sect Leader Jiang, Jiang Cheng, brought a siege upon the Burial Mounds. And he killed you."

Wei WuXian, "I'll have to clarify this one. He didn't kill me. I died from a backfire."

Wen Ning finally looked up at him, "But, Sect Leader Jiang clearly…"

Wei WuXian, "Nobody can walk safely on a single-plank bridge for their whole life. It couldn't be helped."

Wen Ning seemed as if he wanted to sigh, but he had no breath to let out. Wei WuXian ended the conversation, "Okay. Let's not talk about him anymore. Have you heard of anything else?"

"Yes." Wen Ning gazed at him, "Young Master Wei, you died such an awful death."

"..." Looking at how miserable he was, Wei WuXian sighed, "So you haven't heard any good news?"

Wen Ning frowned, "No. There hasn't been any."

"..." Wei WuXian was speechless.

Suddenly, a loud shattering noise came from the main hall of the first floor. Lan SiZhui's voice followed, "Were we not talking about Xue Yang? Why are we now arguing over this?"

Jin Ling, "We talking about Xue Yang. Was what I said wrong? What did Xue Yang do? He's worse than scum, and Wei Ying was even more disgusting than him! What do you mean 'we shouldn't generalize them'? These monsters are vermin to our world! We should kill, murder, and slaughter every single one of them!"

Wen Ning flinched. Wei WuXian gestured for him to stay still. On the other side, Lan JingYi joined in as well, "Why are you being so angry about it? SiZhui did not say that Wei WuXian should not have been killed. He just said that not everyone who cultivates the ghost path is the same type of person as Xue Yang. Did you have to throw things? I did not get to eat that one yet…"

Jin Ling sneered, "Didn't he also say that 'the founder of this path may not have intended harm with it'? Who was 'the founder of this path'? Go on, tell me, who else could it be except for Wei Ying?! I just can't seem to understand you. Your GusuLan Sect is also a prominent sect, and back then you also lost quite a number of people in Wei Ying's hands, didn't you? Was it hard, killing all those corpses and whatnot that were under his control? Lan Yuan, why are you speaking from such a strange standpoint? From the way you talk, don't tell me that you're making excuses for Wei Ying!"

Lan Yuan was Lan SiZhui's birth name. He protested, "I was not making excuses for him. I was simply suggesting that we may not want to make conclusions before we understand the entire situation. You know, before we came to Yi City, a lot of people also claimed that the YueyangChang Clan's Chang Ping was killed by Daozhang Xiao XingChen for revenge, right? But what was the truth?"

Jin Ling, "Nobody actually saw whether or not Chang Ping was killed by Daozhang Xiao XingChen. All they had were guesses, so why are you calling them claims? Just try and count how many cultivators lost their lives to Wei Ying, to Wen Ning, to the Tiger Seal during the battles at the Qiongqi Path and the Nightless Day! These are truths that everyone accepts, that

nobody can deny! And what else I'll never forget is that he ordered Wen Ning to kill my father and mother!"

If Wen Ning had a single trace of blood in his complexion, it would've already drained out of his face.

He breathed, "... Maiden Jiang's son?"

Wei WuXian stayed still.

Jin Ling continued, "My uncle grew up with him, my grandfather saw him as his own child, my grandmother wasn't horrible to him either, but what did he do? He made Lotus Pier the lair of the Wen Sect, he wrecked the entire YunmengJiang Sect, he caused the deaths of both my parents and grandparents, and now my uncle is the only one left! He brought about his own death through the havoc he created and ended up leaving not even a whole corpse behind him! Just which part of the entire situation do you not understand? Just what excuses are you still making for him?!"

He argued forcefully, while Lan SiZhui didn't reply at all. A moment later, another boy spoke up, "Why are we suddenly getting so heated over such a thing? Let's just drop the subject, alright? We haven't finished eating yet. The food's gonna go cold."

Judging from the voice, he was the "sentimental" one that Wei WuXian poked fun at. Someone else agreed, "ZiZhen is right. We should stop arguing. SiZhui simply forgot to choose his words carefully. It was only an offhand comment—how could he have thought about so much? Sit down, Young Master Jin. Let us continue to eat."

"That's right. All of us had just left Yi City, so technically we've already been through life and death together… We really shouldn't argue over such a careless mistake."

Jin Ling snorted. Lan SiZhui finally responded, his tone as polite as ever, "I am sorry. I should have put more thought to my wording. Young Master Jin, please sit back down. We would not want to continue and bring HanGuang-Jun down here as well."

The mention of HanGuang-Jun was truly a splendid move. Immediately, Jin Ling stopped, not even making another noise. The sounds of moving tables and chairs came through. It seemed that he sat back down again. The hall quickly refilled with clamor, and the boys' voices were soon drowned out by the clinks of bowls and dishes. However, Wei WuXian and Wen Ning still stood silently in the grove, their expressions stern.

Without making a sound, Wen Ning kneeled down again. Wei WuXian only noticed him after a short pause. Waving his hand weakly, he responded, “It wasn’t your fault.”

Just as Wen Ning was about to open his mouth again, he suddenly looked behind Wei WuXian and hesitated. Before Wei WuXian could turn around, a white-robed figure walked past him and kicked Wen Ning’s shoulder.

Wen Ning created another man-shaped dent on the ground.

Wei WuXian hurried to pull back Lan WangJi, who seemed as though he wanted to kick again, “HanGuang-Jun, HanGuang-Jun! Calm down!”

It appeared that the time for “sleeping” had passed, while the time for “being drunk” had arrived, and thus Lan WangJi found his way outside.

The situation felt somewhat familiar—history really did repeat itself, didn’t it? However, this time, Lan WangJi looked even more normal than last time. He didn’t wear his boots wrong, either. Even when he rudely kicked over Wen Ning, his expression was still perfectly righteous. Nobody could find any fault on him. After Wei WuXian pulled him back, he fixed his sleeves and nodded. He stood proudly where he was, stopping himself from kicking again.

Wei WuXian used the time to ask Wen Ning, “How are you?”

Wen Ning, “I’m fine.”

Wei WuXian, “If you’re fine then stand up! What are you still kneeling for?”

Wen Ning crawled up and hesitated, “Young Master Lan.”

Lan WangJi scrunched his brows and covered his ears. He then turned around with his back toward Wen Ning. Facing Wei WuXian, he used his own body to block their eye contact.

Wen Ning, “...”

Wei WuXian, “It’s best if you don’t stand there. Lan Zhan, uh, doesn’t really like seeing you.”

Wen Ning, “... What happened to Young Master Lan?”

Wei WuXian, “Nothing much. He’s just drunk.”

“What?” Wen Ning’s face was blank, as though he couldn’t accept such a thing. After a while, he finally continued, “Then… What are you going to do?”

Wei WuXian, “Well, what can I do? I’m gonna carry him inside and tuck him in.”

Lan WangJi, “Okay.”

Wei WuXian, “Hmm? Aren’t you covering your ears? How come you’re suddenly able to hear me again?”

This time, Lan WangJi refused to answer, pretending that the one who interrupted them a moment ago wasn’t him. Wei WuXian wasn’t sure of how to react. He turned to Wen Ning, “Be careful, yourself.”

Wen Ning nodded. He couldn’t help but look at Lan WangJi again. Just as he was about to leave, Wei WuXian stopped him, “Wen Ning, why don’t you… find somewhere to hide first?”

Wen Ning paused for a second. Wei WuXian added, “One can say that you’ve died twice already. Go get some good rest.”

After he left, Wei WuXian took away the hands that Lan WangJi blocked his ears with, “Alright. He’s gone. You can’t hear or see him anymore.”

Lan WangJi finally let go of his own ears. He stared blankly at Wei WuXian with the pair of light-colored eyes.

His eyes were so clear, so honest that a desire of mischief surged through Wei WuXian. As though something inside of his body had been ignited, he smiled teasingly, “Lan Zhan, you’re still gonna answer whatever I ask? Do whatever I tell you to?”

Lan WangJi, “Mnn.”

Wei WuXian, “Take off your forehead ribbon.”

Obediently, Lan WangJi reached behind his head and slowly untied the strands. He took off the white forehead ribbon, which had been sewn with the motif of drifting clouds.

Holding the ribbon in his hands, Wei WuXian turned it over a few times, examining every angle of it, “So there really isn’t anything so special about it, is there? And I thought that it’s hiding

some sort of a gigantic secret. Back then, though, why were you so mad when I took it off?" Or perhaps the past Lan WangJi simply hated him, alongside everything that he did?

Suddenly, he felt something tighten at his wrists. Lan WangJi had tied both of his hands together using the forehead ribbon and was starting to make knots over it.

Wei WuXian, "What are you doing?"

He wanted to see what exactly Lan WangJi wanted to do, so he let him continue. After Lan WangJi secured his hands together, he first tied a simple knot. He thought for a while and, as though he felt that something wasn't quite right, he changed it to a tighter knot. He then thought about it some more, still unsatisfied, and tied another knot on top.

The GusuLan Sect's forehead ribbon was a strip of fabric that hung down at the back after it had been fastened. When one moved, it fluttered elegantly in the air, which was why it was rather long. Lan WangJi tied seven or eight knots on the ribbon, forming a stack of small, ugly-looking lumps, and finally felt pleased enough to stop.

Wei WuXian, "Hey, do you still want this ribbon of yours?"

Lan WangJi's frown dissolved. Holding onto the other end of the forehead ribbon, he lifted Wei WuXian's hands in front of himself, as though he was admiring what a masterpiece he had just created. With his hands suspended in the air, Wei WuXian thought to himself,

"+ " "

Wei WuXian finally realized, "Take it off."

Lan WangJi happily reached for his collar and sash, repeating the exact same approach as before. Wei WuXian shouted, "Don't take this off! Take off the thing on my hands. The thing that you're tying me with. The ribbon."

If Lan WangJi not only tied his hands together but also stripped him of his clothes, the scene would be scary beyond belief!

Hearing his request, Lan WangJi furrowed his brows again, and proceeded to do nothing. Wei WuXian raised his hands and coaxed, "You said that you'll listen to me, didn't you? Be a good boy and take it off."

Lan WangJi glanced at him, then silently moved his sight away, as though he couldn't understand what Wei WuXian was saying and had to ponder upon it for a while longer. Wei WuXian complained, "Oh, now I get it! You're all hyped if I tell you to tie me up, but you can't understand it if I tell you to take it off. Is that so?"

The Lan Sect's forehead ribbon was made from the same material as its uniform. Although it looked flimsy, it was actually quite sturdy. And, since Lan WangJi wrapped it tightly around and tied a long strand of knots, Wei WuXian couldn't struggle out of it no matter how hard he tried. He commented in silence, -

" "

Lan WangJi stared into the distance as he tugged at the ends of the forehead ribbon, contently swinging them around. Wei WuXian pleaded, "Can you please take it off? HanGuang-Jun, how can someone as graceful as you do such a thing? What's the use of tying me like this? It's gonna look so bad on you if someone sees us like this, right?"

Hearing the last sentence, Lan WangJi started to drag him toward the streets.

Pulled around by Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian staggered, "W-w-wait a sec. What I meant was that it'd be bad if someone sees this, not that you let someone see this. Hey! You're just pretending to not understand me, aren't you? Are you doing this on purpose? So you're only gonna understand what you want to understand? Lan Zhan, Lan WangJi!"

Before he even finished speaking, Lan WangJi had already dragged him out of the grove. They walked around onto the street and entered the main hall again through the first floor.

The juniors were still eating and fooling around. Even though a minor disagreement happened, young people were always quick to forget these matters. They were in the middle of playing a drinking game. Some of the bolder juniors of the Lan Sect wanted to sneak a few sips as well. There would always be somebody watching the stairway that led to the second floor, keeping an eye out for Lan WangJi. None of them expected that Lan WangJi would suddenly drag Wei WuXian through the main entrance, where they never paid attention to. All of them were shocked after they turned around.

As Lan JingYi hurled himself at the cup of liquor on the table, hoping to cover it up, he knocked over a few bowls and dishes along the way. The object that he wanted to cover up became even more conspicuous. Lan SiZhui stood up, "H-HanGuang-Jun, why have you come inside through this entrance again?"

Wei WuXian laughed, “Haha. Your HanGuang-Jun was feeling a bit too hot and decided to take a stroll outside so that he could also catch all of you off guard. You see? Here you are, drinking when you’re not supposed to.”

He secretly prayed that Lan WangJi would haul him upstairs directly, without doing or saying anything unnecessary. If he kept silent and maintained the cold appearance, nobody would notice anything wrong with him.

Just as the thought passed through his mind, Lan WangJi dragged him toward the juniors’ table.

Lan SiZhui was beyond shock, “HanGuang-Jun, your forehead ribbon…”

Before he could finish his words, he saw Wei WuXian’s hands.

HanGuang-Jun’s forehead ribbon was tied around Wei WuXian’s wrists.

As though he felt that not enough people noticed this fact, holding the ends of the ribbon, Lan WangJi held up Wei WuXian’s hands and displayed it for everyone to see.

Translator’s Notes

) : Well, now that we have the Cloud Recesses, the Lotus Pier, and the Koi Tower, why not give Luanzang Hill a proper name as well?

Chapter 44 Allure—Part Two

The chicken wing that Lan JingYi was holding in his mouth plopped into his bowl, splattering the sauce onto the front of his clothes.

One single thought filled Wei WuXian's mind—after Lan WangJi sobered up, he wouldn't ever have the to look at others again.

Jin Ling was bewildered, "... What's he doing?"

Wei WuXian, "Showing you guys a special way to use the Lan Sect's forehead ribbon."

Lan SiZhui, "What special way…"

Wei WuXian, "When you find a really strange corpse and you feel that you should take it back to examine it properly, you can take off your forehead ribbon and bring it back like this."

Lan JingYi blurted, "But you cannot do that! Our sect's forehead ribbon is…"

Lan SiZhui stuffed the chicken wing back into his mouth, "Oh, I see! I did not know that it can be used in such a way!"

Ignoring the strange looks that other people gave them, Lan WangJi dragged Wei WuXian up the stairs.

He entered the room, turned around, closed the doors, latched them, and finally pushed the table over as though he wanted to block out an imaginary enemy. Watching Lan WangJi hurry around, Wei WuXian asked, "Are you gonna kill me here?"

Within the private room, there was a wooden screen, which separated the space inside the room into two halves. One half had a table and a few chairs for eating and chatting, while the other had a and curtains for resting. After Lan WangJi dragged him to the other side of the screen, he forcefully pushed Wei WuXian onto the bed.

Wei WuXian's head knocked lightly against the wooden backing that was joined to the bed. He gave an offhand "ow" in exclamation as he thought,

Hearing the exclamation, Lan WangJi lifted the hems of his white robes and sat down elegantly on the bed, reaching out to feel Wei WuXian's head. Although he was expressionless, his movements were extremely gentle, as though he was asking "did it hurt?"

As his hand felt around, Wei WuXian's lips twitched, "It hurts! It hurts sooo much!"

From the cries of pain, a slight worrying expression finally formed over Lan WangJi's face. His hands were even gentler as he patted Wei WuXian's shoulder as though to comfort him. Wei WuXian raised his wrists for him to see, "Why don't you let me go? HanGuang-Jun, it's so tight that my hands are almost bleeding. It hurts so much! Take off the ribbon and let me go, okay? Okay?"

Lan WangJi covered his mouth at once.

Wei WuXian, "Mn mnn mnnfffff mnn mn mnfffnnnnn mnn mnnnnn mnn mnnn nfff mn nn, mnn nn mnn mnnfff mnnn mnnfff nnnff mnnn mnnff mnn nnf mn mnn mnff?!"

2 "
1 $

How rude!

Wei WuXian thought to himself, 5 "

Lan WangJi was tightly covering Wei WuXian's mouth with one hand. Under it, Wei WuXian parted his lips and quickly brushed the tip of his tongue over Lan WangJi's palm.

It was only , yet Lan WangJi looked as if his palm had been singed by a flame. He instantly took his hand away.

Wei WuXian took in a deep breath. Just as he felt that he one-upped Lan WangJi again, he saw him turn around. Sitting on the bed, Lan WangJi hugged his knees and clutched the hand that Wei WuXian had just licked to his chest, not moving at all.

Wei WuXian, "What's this? What are you doing?"

He appeared as though he'd given up on life, having been tainted by a pervert and such. People who walked upon the scene might actually think that Wei WuXian did something to him.

Wei WuXian commented on his defeated look, “You didn’t like it? Well, it’s not my fault if you didn’t like it. You’re the one who was being so pushy and didn’t even let me speak. Why don’t you come here, and I’ll wipe it for you?”

He reached toward Lan WangJi’s shoulder with his bound hands, but Lan WangJi avoided him. Seeing how quietly he nestled at the corner of the bed, Wei WuXian felt the familiar urge of mischief again.

Kneeling on the bed, he moved toward Lan WangJi and smiled through the most devilish tone that he could manage, “You scared?”

Lan WangJi jumped off the bed at once. As though he really was scared, he continued to stand with his back to him and maintained the distance between them.

Wei WuXian was finally starting to enjoy himself.

He grinned as he calmly left the bed, “Hey, what are you hiding for? My hands are still tied, and I’m not even scared, so why would you be scared? Come, come. Come here.”

He approached Lan WangJi, harboring no good intentions at all. Lan WangJi passed the wooden screen only to run into the table that he himself blocked the doors with. Wei WuXian walked past the screen, chasing after him, while he went the other way around. The two circled the screen for quite a number of times, and Wei WuXian was just starting to feel the fun of it as he suddenly realized, ' ' #
% 6 " "

Noticing that the person chasing him had stopped, Lan WangJi stopped as well.

Hiding behind the screen, he showed only half of his fair-skinned face, peeking silently at the direction of Wei WuXian.

Wei WuXian watched him carefully. He still looked so prim and proper, as though the six-year-old who chased Wei WuXian around the screen was somebody else.

Wei WuXian, “Do you want to continue?”

Expressionless, Lan WangJi nodded.

Wei WuXian struggled to hold back his laughter.

Hahahahahahahahahahahahaha oh gosh Lan Zhan wanted to play hide-and-seek with him now that he was drunk hahahahahahahahahahahahaha!

The laughter that he tried to suppress was even greater than tidal waves. Finally having managed to hold it back, Wei WuXian's entire body was shivering, # - % 2
" % 6
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He ran a few more steps toward Lan WangJi, pretending that he was going to chase him. As he had expected, Lan WangJi started to go in the opposite direction. As though he was playing with a toddler, Wei WuXian cooperated as best as he could, chasing him around the screen a few more times, "Run, run. Go faster. I'm gonna catch you! If I catch you, I'm going to lick you again. Scared, much?"

He originally intended it to be a threat. However, Lan WangJi suddenly walked toward him from the other side of the screen, and the two bumped into each other.

Wei WuXian was planning to catch him, not at all expecting that he'd walk right into his arms. Speechlessly startled, he even forgot to reach out. Seeing that Wei WuXian didn't do anything, Lan WangJi lifted his tied-up hands and brought them over his neck as if he voluntarily slipped into an unbreakable trap, "You caught me."

Wei WuXian, "... Huh? Yes, I caught you."

As though he was waiting for something to happen but it never did, Lan WangJi repeated the three words again. This time, he enunciated each word with heavy emphasis and sounded anxiously eager, "You caught me."

Wei WuXian, "Yeah. I caught you."

He caught him. What else?

What did he say? What was he going to do after catching him?

… No.

Wei WuXian, "This time doesn't count. You walked over yourself."

Before he even finished his words, Lan WangJi's expression had darkened. He looked extremely unhappy.

Wei WuXian, 3 # % 6 ' '

He wanted to take his arms away from Lan WangJi's neck, but Lan WangJi reached for them before he did. He held them securely at Wei WuXian's neck, not letting him take them away. Seeing how one of Lan WangJi's hands just happened to be pressing onto his arm, Wei WuXian thought for a moment, then shifted over, moving his face closer and closer. His lips swept across the back of Lan WangJi's hand as though it was a halfway kiss. The tip of his tongue skimmed lightly over the jade-like skin.

Lightly. Very lightly.

Lan WangJi flinched and removed his hand as fast as he could. He took away Wei WuXian's arms, turned his back to him again, and darted to the side. Again clutching the hand that had been licked, he faced the wall silently.

Wei WuXian pondered, = ?

As he was pondering, Lan WangJi turned around, his face as calm as always, "Again."

Wei WuXian, "Again? Again what?"

Lan WangJi hid behind the wooden screen once more and peeked at him with only half of his face showing.

His intentions were as clear as could be—again, you chase, I run.

Speechless for a moment, Wei WuXian obeyed and did it again. This time, having only been chased for a short while, Lan WangJi ran into him again.

Wei WuXian, "You really are doing this on purpose, aren't you?"

Again, Lan WangJi brought Wei WuXian's arms around his neck as though he couldn't understand what his words meant, waiting for him to fulfil his promise again.

Wei WuXian, # 1 % 6 ? ,
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With his arms around Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian returned to the bed with him, then asked, “You like this, don’t you? Don’t turn around. Speak. Do you like it or not? If you like it, we don’t have to run around every single time. How about I let you have as much fun as you want?”

As he spoke, he held up one of Lan WangJi’s hands, bent down, and kissed between two of his slender fingers.

Lan WangJi wanted to take his hand away again, but Wei WuXian held it tightly, not allowing him to do so.

And then, Wei WuXian’s lips pressed onto his distinct knuckles. Softer than the touch of feather, his breaths wandered to the back of his hand, and he kissed again.

Lan WangJi couldn’t pull his hand back no matter how hard he tried. He could only clench his fingers together into a tight fist.

Wei WuXian lifted up his sleeves, revealing the pale-skinned wrist, then kissed it as well.

After he kissed, he didn’t raise his head. He only turned his eyes to Lan WangJi, “Is that enough?”

Lan WangJi pursed his lips, refusing to speak a single word. Wei WuXian finally sat up straight again and continued, his voice unhurried, “Tell me. Have you burnt any paper money for me?”

There was no answer. Wei WuXian laughed out loud and inched toward him. Over the clothing, he kissed where his heart was, “If you don’t talk, I’m not gonna give you any more. Tell me. How did you know it was me?”

Lan WangJi closed his eyes. His lips quivered, as though he was on the verge of confessing.

Suddenly, however, as Wei WuXian stared at those soft, pale-red lips, he didn’t know what had taken over him, but he suddenly went and kissed them.

After the kiss, he even licked them, as though a kiss wasn’t enough.

Both of them widened their eyes.

A moment later, Lan WangJi raised his hand. At once, Wei WuXian was startled into realization. He immediately broke into a cold sweat, fearing that Lan WangJi would smack him dead on the spot, and quickly scrambled off the bed. Turning around, he saw Lan WangJi smack his own forehead. He now lay unconscious, collapsed on the bed.

Inside of the private room, Lan WangJi lay on the bed as Wei WuXian sat on the ground. A cold gust of wind rushed inside through the opened windows, sending chills down Wei WuXian's back. His head finally felt clearer.

He stood up from the ground, pushed the table to where it used to be, then sat down beside it.

After spacing out for a while, he used his teeth to bite at the knots on the forehead ribbon. With effort, he finally managed to open the stack of lumps.

Now that his hands had been loosened, to get over the shock, he went to pour himself a cup of liquor. He held the cup to his lips for a few moments, but not a single drop entered his mouth. Looking down, he finally saw that there wasn't any liquor in the cup at all. He had already downed the entire pot. Even when he was pouring, he failed to notice that nothing was being poured out.

Wei WuXian put the empty cup back onto the table, 5

As he turned around, past the wooden screen, he could see Lan WangJi, who lay quietly on the bed. He thought to himself, % 6

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Remembering what an "outrageous" thing did he just do to Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian couldn't help but touched his lips.

He only managed to flatten the forehead ribbon again after a while of work. Walking to the bed, he put it beside the pillow, and succeeded in holding himself back from even looking at Lan WangJi. He squatted down and took off Lan WangJi's boots, then placed him in the official sleeping position of the Lan Sect.

After everything had been done, leaning against the bed, Wei WuXian took a seat on the ground again. His mind was in a jumbled state of confusion, but one thought stood out from the rest—

In the future, it was best to not make Lan Zhan drink anymore. If he treated everyone like this when he became drunk, then the situation really wouldn't be well.

Translator's Notes

2 : This, again, refers to the Chinese concept of face. It pretty much means that he'd have too bad of a reputation to ever dare show his face to other people again.

: The long bed, in this case, is similar to a slender daybed couch, but it's made of wood and there's no matting.

% : This is a common proverb in China that describes light, dainty kisses.

Chapter 45 Allure—Part Three

For some reason, tonight, Wei WuXian felt a bit too guilty to still dare squeezing himself onto the same bed as Lan WangJi. He spent the rest of the evening sitting on the ground and fell asleep sometime during the night, his head leaning on the wooden bed. At dawn, he vaguely felt someone lift him up with gentle movements and place him onto the bed. Struggling to open his eyes, Wei WuXian could see Lan WangJi's still-indifferent face.

He immediately felt more awake, "Lan Zhan."

Lan WangJi answered with a "mnn". Wei WuXian asked, "Are you sober or still drunk?"

Lan WangJi, "Sober."

Wei WuXian, "Oh… So it's five already."

Lan WangJi woke up at this time every single day, which was why Wei WuXian learnt how to tell the time without looking out the windows. He held up Wei WuXian's wrists, of which both were covered in reddish marks. He took out a small, turquoise porcelain bottle from within his sleeves and applied the contents. The areas that the smooth ointment had been spread on felt soothed at once. Wei WuXian squinted, "It hurts… HanGuang-Jun, you're so rude when you're drunk."

Lan WangJi didn't even look up, "You reaped what you had sown."

Wei WuXian's heart skipped a beat, "Lan Zhan, you really don't remember what you did after you were drunk, do you?"

Lan WangJi, "I do not."

Wei WuXian, 3 ? "

In his heart, he found it both good and unfortunate that Lan WangJi didn't remember. It felt as though he'd secretly done or eaten something he shouldn't have and was hiding alone in a corner, snickering at how nobody found out but disappointed that he couldn't share the delight with anyone. Involuntarily, his eyes caught sight of Lan WangJi's lips again.

Although the corners never lifted, his lips looked quite soft, and did indeed feel quite soft.

Wei WuXian unconsciously bit at his own lips and started to space out again, 3 - %
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After Lan WangJi finished applying the ointment, somebody knocked three times at the door. Lan SiZhui's voice came through, "HanGuang-Jun, everyone is up. Will we be leaving?"

Lan WangJi, "Wait downstairs."

The group left the city and was parting ways before the city's tower. Originally, the disciples weren't as familiar with one another. They had only visited the others during discussion conferences at their respective sects. However, during these past few days, they'd been through both the cat corpse's incidents and a thrilling day at a haunted city with the others. They'd even burnt paper money, snuck liquor, argued, and cursed other people together. In summary, they already knew one another quite well. Before the departures, all of them were reluctant to leave, taking their time in front of the city gates to discuss when to visit one's discussion conference and when to night-hunt at another's place. Lan WangJi didn't hurry them, either. He let them chatter on as he himself stood silently under a tree. Under Lan WangJi's eyes, Fairy didn't at all dare to bark or run around. Crouching under the tree as well, it stared anxiously at Jin Ling, wagging its tail at him.

Taking the chance that Fairy was being watched by Lan WangJi, Wei WuXian grabbed Jin Ling's shoulder and walked for some time.

Mo XuanYu was one of Jin GuangShan's illegitimate sons, which made him a half brother of Jin ZiXuan and Jin GuangYao. In terms of the generations, he could be considered Jin Ling's uncle as well. Thus, he walked as he righteously talked to Jin Ling in a patronizing tone, "When you go back, don't keep on arguing with your uncle. Listen to him. Be careful from now on. Don't run around trying to night-hunt alone again."

Although Jin Ling was from a prominent sect, rumors didn't let anyone off. With both of his

parents gone, it was only natural for him to want to prove himself to others as soon as possible.

Wei WuXian continued, “What are you? Fifteen? Most of the disciples around your age haven’t hunted any amazing beasts either, so why should you be so eager and strive for such a first?”

Jin Ling sulked, “My uncles were also fifteen-or-so when they became famous.”

Wei WuXian commented in silence, 3 $ / > 2 "
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Jin Ling added, “Even when the dog Wei Ying was around fifteen when he killed the Tortoise of Slaughter. If he could even do it, why can’t I?”

Hearing his name come right after the word before it, Wei WuXian blood run cold. He somehow managed to shake off the goosebumps on his back, “He was the one who killed it? Wasn’t it killed by HanGuang-Jun?”

After the mention of Lan WangJi, Jin Ling looked to Wei WuXian in a strange way. He wanted to say something, but held it back, “You and HanGuang-Jun… Nevermind. It’s your own business. Anyways, I don’t care about you guys at all. Have fun being cut-sleeve. The disease is incurable.”

Wei WuXian grinned, “Hey, how is it a disease?”

He was laughing in silence, , % 6 $

Jin Ling continued, “I already know the meaning behind the GusuLan Sect’s forehead ribbon. Now that it’s already like this, then stay by HanGuang-Jun’s side properly. Even if you’re a cut-sleeve, you should be a modest one. Don’t go about messing with other men, especially people from our sect! Or else, don’t blame the results on me.”

The “our sect” that he said included both the LanlingJin and the YunmengJiang Sect. It seemed that his ability to tolerate cut-sleeves had increased, that as long as it wasn’t anyone from the two sects, he could turn a blind eye to it.

Wei WuXian disagreed, “You little brat! What do you mean ‘messing with other men’? I’m not that terrible of a person. Forehead ribbon? There’s a meaning behind the GusuLan Sect’s forehead ribbon?”

Jin Ling, “Come on! You know what it means. Stop getting so carried away. I don’t want to talk about this anymore. Are you Wei Ying?”

At the end of his reply, he suddenly tossed out the straightforward question, taking Wei WuXian by surprise. Wei WuXian responded calmly, “Do you think we’re similar?”

Jin Ling was silent for a while. Then, he suddenly whistled and called out, “Fairy!”

Having been called by its owner, with its tongue sticking out, Fairy sprinted over. Wei WuXian broke into a run at once, “Be nice! What are you sending out the dog for?!”

Jin Ling, “Hmph! Goodbye!”

After he said goodbye, he proudly marched in the direction of Lanling, probably still afraid to see Jiang Cheng in Yunmeng’s Lotus Pier. The disciples from the other sects went off in different directions as well. In the end, Wei WuXian, Lan WangJi, and the juniors of the Lan Sect were the only ones left.

As they walked, the juniors couldn’t hold themselves from turning around and looking back. Although Lan JingYi didn’t say anything, the reluctance to leave was written all over his face. He asked, “Where are we going next?”

Lan SiZhui, “ZeWu-Jun is currently night-hunting in the Tanzhou area. Are we going to directly return to the Cloud Recesses, or go over there to meet up with him?”

Lan WangJi, “Go to Tanzhou.”

Wei WuXian, “Great. Maybe we can even help him. We don’t know where next to search for our dear friend’s head, anyways.”

The two walked in the front while the rest of the boys followed some distance behind them. After walking for a while, Lan WangJi spoke up, “Jiang Cheng knows who you are.”

Wei WuXian was sitting on the donkey as it slowly trotted forward, “Yeah, he knows. What can he do, though? He doesn’t have any evidence.”

Unlike the possession of bodies, there was no evidence to the sacrifice of bodies. Jiang Cheng only determined the fact through how he looked when facing a dog, anyway. First, Jiang Cheng had never told anyone that Wei WuXian was afraid of dogs; second, only those familiar with him

would be able to judge things based on reactions and expressions, since there couldn't be any conclusive proof. Even if Jiang Cheng finally chose to stick flyers that said the YiLing Patriarch Wei WuXian was scared of dogs everywhere he could, everyone would probably still believe that the SanDu ShengShou had finally become crazy after searching for the YiLing Patriarch for so many times and failing every attempt.

Wei WuXian, "So, I'm actually really curious. Just how did you recognize me?"

Lan WangJi replied in a calm voice, "I am also really curious as to why your memory is so bad."

They arrived at Tanzhou within a day. Before they met up with Lan XiChen, they passed a garden along the way. Seeing how the garden was big and majestic yet had no-one to care for it, all of the disciples went inside out of curiosity. As long as it wasn't anything against the sect rules, Lan WangJi never stopped them, which was why he let them inside. In the garden, there was a pavilion and a few fences, a table and a few stools, all made of stone, for people to enjoy the scenery. However, through years of wind and rain, one corner had fallen off the pavilion and two of the stools had toppled over. There were no plants or flowers in the garden, only brittle branches and withered leaves. This garden had been abandoned since a long time ago.

After the juniors roamed eagerly around the garden for a while, Lan SiZhui spoke up, "This is the garden of the Damsel of Annual Blossoms, is it not?"

Lan JingYi was confused, "The Damsel of Annual Blossoms? Who is that? Does the garden have an owner? Why does it look so worn-down? It seems like nobody has been caring for it for a long time."

Annual blossoms were flowers that had short flowering periods and only bloom during certain seasons. There were many varied types and colors, which filled the entire garden with fragrance when they bloomed. Hearing the name, Wei WuXian couldn't help but recalled something.

Placing his hand over one of the pillars of the pavilion, Lan SiZhui thought for a while, "If I remember correctly, it probably is. This garden used to be rather famous. I read about it on a book once, in the chapter 3 / 2 0 = . In Tanzhou there is a garden, and in the garden there is a damsel. Under the moonlight, if one should recite poetry, when she deems it fine, she grants them an annual blossom, the fragrance of which persists for three years; when she deems it poor or when the rhyming does not pass, she casts a blossom at their face, then fades away."

Lan JingYi, “So if you recited the poetry wrong she would throw a flower at your face? Hopefully the flowers did not have thorns. Or else, if I were there to try, my face would definitely start bleeding. What sort of was she?”

Lan SiZhui, “I would not call her a fae. She was more like a spirit. The legends have it that the earliest owner of the garden was a poet. He planted these flowers himself and treated them as friends, reciting poetry here everyday. Affected by the emotions of the poetry, a spirit crystallized from the flora of the garden and became the Damsel of Annual Blossoms. When someone came, if their poetry was decent and allowed her to remember the one who planted her, she would be happy and give them a flower. If the poetry was wrong or did not sound pleasing, she would emerge from the bushes and hurl a flower onto the person’s face. The one who had been attacked would faint and realize that they had been thrown out of the garden after they woke up. Ten years ago, an endless number of people would come to this garden.”

Wei WuXian, “Romantic, romantic. But I know for sure that the GusuLan Sect’s Library Pavilion wouldn’t hold books that say such things. SiZhui, be honest. Tell us what book you were reading and who gave it to you.”

Lan SiZhui blushed and sneaked a glance at Lan WangJi, worried that he’d be punished. Lan JingYi asked, “Is the Damsel really pretty? Or else why would so many people come?”

Seeing that Lan WangJi had no intentions of scolding him, Lan SiZhui secretly let out a sigh of relief. Only then did he smile and reply, “She probably was. After all, she crystallized from such pleasant things and was such a romantic spirit. But in reality, nobody had ever seen the Damsel’s face. Because of how even if someone did not know how to compose poetry, it was more than easy for them to memorize a few poems, most people had received the Damsel’s flowers. Even when there came the rare person who recited wrong, they would not get to meet her since they were knocked out immediately. However… one person was the exception.”

Another boy asked, “Who?”

Wei WuXian let out a light cough.

Lan SiZhui, “The YiLing patriarch, Wei WuXian.”

Wei WuXian coughed again, “Uh, why’s it him again? Can’t we talk about something else?”

Nobody paid him any attention. Lan JingYi waved anxiously, “Be quiet! What did Wei WuXian do? He was such a big villain—what did he do, this time? Did he snatch the Damsel away and take her outside?”

Lan SiZhui, “Well, no. But, in order to see the Damsel’s face, he went out of his way to come to Tanzhou all the way from Yunmeng. Whenever he came to the garden, he would recite the poetry wrong on purpose so that the Damsel became angered, hit him with flowers, and threw him out. When he woke up, he would crawl back inside and continue to recite incorrectly. After this repeated for more than twenty times, he finally saw the Damsel’s face. After this, he would go about everywhere praising how beautiful she looked. However, the Damsel was rather irritated as well. She did not show up for quite a while. Whenever he came, she would pound him with a rain of flowers. The scene was truly more wondrous than any wonders.”

The boys bursted into laughter, “Wei WuXian was such an annoying person!”

“Was he really that bored?”

Wei WuXian touched his chin, “How was it boring? Who hasn’t done a couple of such things when they were young? Speaking of it, why do people even know about something like this? And it’s even seriously recorded in a book. That’s pretty boring as well, if you ask me.”

Lan WangJi was looking at him. Although still expressionless, an unusual glint hid beneath his eyes. He looked as though he was laughing at him. Wei WuXian thought to himself, , %
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He declared, “You children are so hyper all the time. You’ve definitely been reading idle books instead of focusing on cultivation. When you get back, make sure HanGuang-Jun punishes you by making you copy the sect rules. Ten times.”

The boys wailed, “Ten times even when doing the handstand?!”

Wei WuXian was also shocked. He turned to Lan WangJi, “Your sect makes disciples do handstands while copying? That's awful.”

Lan WangJi replied calmly, “There would always be someone who did not learn their lessons by simply copying the sect rules. Handstands not only guaranteed better performance in the future but also benefited cultivation.”

Of course, Wei WuXian was the someone who never learnt his lessons. He pretended as though he didn’t know what Lan WangJi was talking about. Turning around, he found himself glad that he didn’t have to copy the scriptures while doing handstands.

In high spirits from listening to the stories, the boys decided that they'd camp at the Garden of Annual Blossoms for the night. Camping was common during night-hunts, anyway. The group gathered a pile of dead branches and dry leaves from around them and finished making the bonfire. Lan WangJi went away to patrol the area, not only making sure that their surroundings were safe but also setting up an array in case of any night attacks. Stretching out his legs, Wei WuXian sat by the fire. Now that Lan WangJi was gone, he finally had a chance to clear up his confusion, "Right. I need to ask you guys a question. Just what is the meaning behind your sect's forehead ribbon?"

Hearing this, the boys' expressions changed at once. They'd all started to stammer. Wei WuXian's heart skipped a beat and then thumped faster and faster.

Lan SiZhui asked in caution, "Senior, do you not know?"

Wei WuXian, "If I knew would I still have asked? Do I seem like that bored of a person?"

Lan JingYi mumbled, "Yes… After all, you could even do something like tricking us to line up and look at that sort of thing…"

Wei WuXian poked at the fire with a stick, releasing bursts of sparks, "Wasn't that for you to train yourselves and get out of your comfort zones? It really is effective. If you listen to what I say, you'll definitely benefit from them in the future."

Lan SiZhui seemed as though he was carefully choosing his words. He only answered after a long while of hesitation, "Okay. The forehead ribbon of the GusuLan Sect means to "regulate oneself". Senior, you know this, right?"

Wei WuXian, "Yes. And?"

Lan SiZhui continued, "And the founder of the GusuLan Sect, Lan An, had said that one can only let go of all regulations when they are with the one they love and cherish. So, the message that has been passed down the generations is that, uh, our sect's forehead ribbon is a special object that is very, very personal and sensitive. One cannot easily give another permission to touch it, one cannot take it off as they please, and one absolutely cannot tie it on someone else. It is prohibited. That is, unless, unless…"

He didn't need to finish his sentence.

By the bonfire, the young, innocent faces blushed many shades of red. Even Lan SiZhui couldn't continue speaking.

Wei WuXian felt almost half of the blood in his body rush to his head.

The forehead ribbon, the forehead ribbon, th-th-the…

The forehead ribbon was indeed quite significant!

He suddenly felt that he really needed some fresh air. He sprang up and darted outside, only managing to find his balance by holding onto the bark of a wilted tree. He exclaimed in silence,

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Back then, at Qishan, the Wen Sect held a grand Discussion Conference. The conference was to last for seven days. Each of the seven days' entertainment had been planned to be different. One of those days involved an archery competition.

The rules of the competition were as follow. Any disciples younger than twenty were to enter the hunting grounds. Of the more than a thousand life-sized paper mannequin targets, only one hundred were possessed by fierce spirits. If one shot the wrong target, they were out at once. One could only stay in the competition of they continuously shot correct paper mannequins that held evil spirits in them. In the end, the disciples were ranked by who shot the most, who shot with highest accuracy, and so on.

In such an event, of course Wei WuXian would be participating as one of the YunmengJiang Sect's contestants. Before the competition, since he had been listening to the sects' debates for the entire morning, he was feeling unusually groggy. His spirits only lifted as he heaved the bow and arrows onto his back. Yawning as he walked toward the hunting grounds, he suddenly caught sight of a handsome boy with a fair face and a cold demeanor to the side of him. He wore a red round-collar robe with sleeves that had tight openings and a belt of nine golden rings. This was the uniform attire of all of the juniors who came to the Qishan Discussion Conference. On him, it looked exceptionally good. He had a dash of elegance, a few traces of vigour, but a whole lot of good looks. One couldn't help but brighten up at the sight of such a boy.

The boy was in the middle of trying out his bow, carrying a bundle of arrows with white-feathered fletchings. Brushing past the bowstring, his slender fingers made the it sound as though it were a guqin string, strong yet beautiful.

To Wei WuXian, the boy felt a bit familiar. After he thought for a while, he finally remembered and greeted the boy with enthusiasm, "Hey! WangJi-xiong, it's you!"

At the time, it had already been a year since Wei WuXian studied at Gusu and was sent back to Yunmeng. After he arrived at Yunmeng, he told the people there all about what he had seen in Gusu, especially things such as how although Lan WangJi's face looked nice he was so stiff as to do this, so boring as to do that. Not long afterward, he had forgotten all about his days at Gusu and continued to fool around in the lakes and mountains. In the past, he had only seen Lan WangJi in the plain "mourning clothes" of the GusuLan Sect's uniform, never in such a bright, eye-catching outfit. Along with that overly-pretty face of Lan WangJi's, now that they met again, Wei WuXian's eyes had momentarily been blinded by his looks, failing to immediately recognize him.

On the other hand, as soon as Lan WangJi finished testing his bow, he walked away at once. Awkwardly, Wei WuXian turned to Jiang Cheng, "He ignored me again. Huh."

Jiang Cheng glanced at him with indifference, also deciding to ignore him. There were more than twenty entrances to the shooting range; each sect's was different. As Lan WangJi walked toward the entrance of the GusuLan Sect, Wei WuXian sneaked over before he could. Lan WangJi shifted to the one side, and he shifted to the side as well; Lan WangJi moved to the other side, and he moved to the other side as well. In short, he simply refused to let Lan WangJi pass.

In the end, standing where he was, Lan WangJi raised his chin slightly. In a serious tone, he spoke, "Excuse me."

Wei WuXian, "You're finally gonna talk to me? Were you pretending that you didn't know me or that you didn't hear me?"

Not far away, the boys from other sects all stared at them. Some laughed, some exclaimed. Jiang Cheng clicked his tongue impatiently. With arrows on his back, he walked toward another entrance.

Lan WangJi raised his eyes coldly and repeated, "Excuse me."

A faint smile by his lips, Wei WuXian raised his brows and turned to the side. The arch door of the entrance was rather narrow. Lan WangJi could only brush by him as he walked in. After he entered, Wei WuXian shouted from behind him, "Lan Zhan, your forehead ribbon is crooked."

All disciples from prominent sects took great care to maintain their appearances, especially those from the GusuLan Sect. Hearing this, Lan WangJi reached to adjust it without a second thought. Yet, the forehead ribbon was clearly as proper as always. Turning around, he casted an annoyed look at Wei WuXian. The latter only laughed as he turned to the YunmengJiang Sect's entrance.

After everyone had entered and the competition had officially began, one by one, disciples left due to accidentally shooting normal mannequins. With each shot, Wei WuXian brought one down. Although he was slow, he never missed once. The number of arrows in the quiver soon decreased by seventeen or eighteen. Just as he was thinking about what would happen if he shot with his other hand, suddenly, something drifted to his face.

Softer than even the touch of carried by the wind, the object made Wei WuXian's cheek itch. Turning around, he saw that Lan WangJi had somehow already walked near him. With his back facing Wei WuXian and front to a paper mannequin, he was in the process of drawing his bow.

The ends of his forehead ribbon danced in the breeze, gently brushing against Wei WuXian's face.

He squinted, "WangJi-xiong!"

With his bow already in the shape of a full moon, Lan WangJi still responded after a short moment of hesitation, "What?"

Wei WuXian, "Your forehead ribbon is crooked."

This time, Lan WangJi refused to believe him again. As he released his arrow, he replied without even turning around, "Ridiculous."

Wei WuXian, "It's true this time! It really is crooked. Just watch if you don't believe me. Let me straighten it up for you."

He proceeded as he spoke, grabbing the ribbon tail that kept on fluttering in front of his eyes. Alas, however, his hands were simply too unruly. In the past, he made a habit of pulling on the Yunmeng girls' braids. Whenever he touched a strip-like object, he'd have the urge to tug it. Thus, without a second thought, he tugged it this time as well. However, since the forehead ribbon was already slightly askew, a bit loose, now that he pulled on it, it fell from Lan WangJi's forehead at once.

The hand that Lan WangJi held the bow with immediately gave out a shiver.

He only managed to turn around after quite a long while. Slowly, his eyes finally locked into Wei WuXian's.

Wei WuXian was still holding the soft ribbon in his hand, “I’m sorry. It wasn’t on purpose. Here, you can tie it up again.”

Lan WangJi’s expression was darker than ever.

It almost seemed as if a cloud of black fog hovered over his face. As he clenched his arrow, veins climbed over the back of his hand. He appeared so angry that his body was almost shaking. Seeing that even his eyes looked bloodshot, Wei WuXian couldn’t help but squeeze the forehead ribbon, #

Shocked that he dared to squeeze it, Lan WangJi snatched the forehead ribbon from his hands as fast as he could.

Wei WuXian let go the moment he snatched it. The rest of the Lan Sect’s disciples ceased with their attacks as well, and everyone came over. Arm around his younger brother, Lan XiChen talked to the unspeaking Lan WangJi in a low voice. All of the others seemed similarly serious, as though they were facing a powerful enemy. They shook their heads as they spoke, glancing at Wei WuXian with odd, indescribable looks on their faces.

Wei WuXian only heard a few vague terms, such as “accident”, “calm down”, “no need to worry”, “a man”, “the sect rules”, and so on. He felt even more confused. After glowering at him one last time, Lan WangJi turned around and walked alone toward the outside of the range.

Jiang Cheng came over and asked, “What did you do, this time? Didn’t I tell you not to tease him? Your day just won’t be complete unless you dig your own grave at least once, huh?”

Wei WuXian shrugged, “I said that his forehead ribbon was crooked. I was tricking him the first time but the second time was real. He didn’t believe me and got mad. I didn’t pull off his forehead ribbon on purpose. Why do you think he’s so angry? He’s not even participating in the contest anymore.”

Jiang Cheng mocked, “Isn’t it clear? It’s because he especially hates you!”

The arrows behind him were almost all gone. Seeing this, Wei WuXian got to work as well.

Throughout all these years, he never really paid much attention to this incident. In the beginning, he actually did doubt that the forehead ribbon held a special meaning to the Lan Clan. After the competition, though, he forgot all about it. Now that he thought about how the other disciples of the Lan Sect looked at him…

With his forehead ribbon taken off by a brat without any consent or whatsoever in front of everyone's eyes, Lan Zhan managed to hold himself back from shooting Wei WuXian to death right then, right there—people with good manners were so scary!!! He was indeed worthy of the title HanGuang-Jun!!!

And, thinking about it some more, Wei WuXian realized that he touched Lan WangJi's forehead ribbon more than just once after the incident!!!

Lan JingYi puzzled, "What is he doing, walking here and there like that? Did he eat too much?"

Another boy added, "And his face is switching between red and green… Is it something that that he ate?"

"We did not eat anything special in particular… Is it because of the forehead ribbon's meaning? He seems a bit too excited. It seems like he really loves HanGuang-Jun a lot. Look at how happy he is…"

Wei WuXian finally managed to calm down after walking around a bush of withered flowers for about fifty times. Hearing that last sentence, he was between laughter and tears. Suddenly, he heard the noise of somebody stepping on dried leaves behind him.

From the sound of the footsteps, he could tell that it wasn't a child. Lan WangJi had probably come back. Quickly adjusting his facial expressions, Wei WuXian turned around to see a black figure standing within the shadow of a dead tree nearby.

The figure was quite tall, quite straight, quite dignified.

It was missing a head, though.

Translator's Notes

2 : Previously translated as ... It just didn't seem right to have demon, ghost, monster, and all of a sudden a pinyin.

: Filling the skies with white, fluffy seeds, catkins have long been the subject of many renowned poets in China. Of course, in places like Beijing, it's quite annoying for people with allergies.